



TALKING DUCK SPEAKS OUT ON TAPE

EARTH VS SATURN TIKTOK TIME TRAVELLER'S FUTURE SHOCK
SHAGGY DOGS "MY DAD SAW BLACK SHUCK IN THE SEVENTIES"
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LEGENDS**

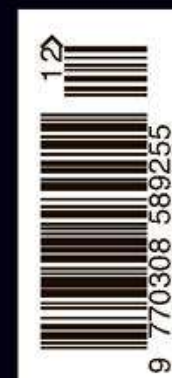
BOTTOMLESS LAKES
AND HOLES TO HELL

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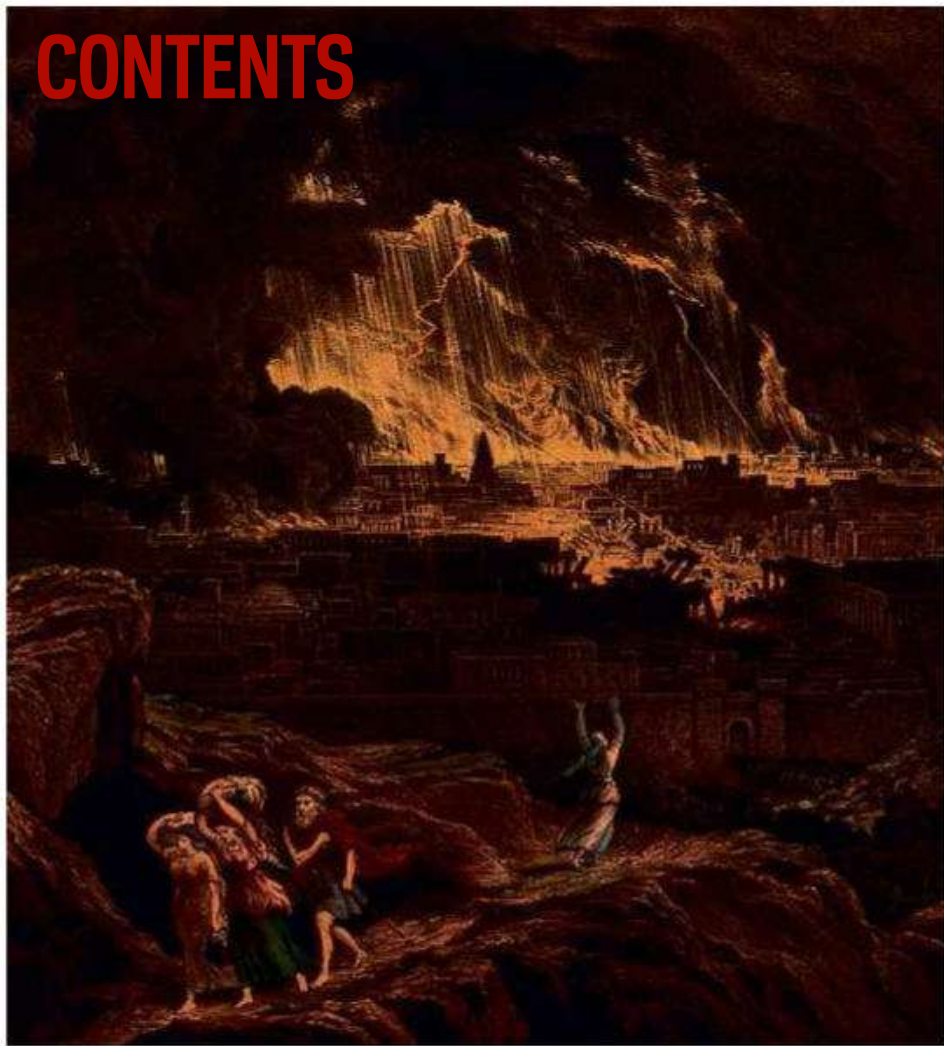
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FORTEAN TIMES 412

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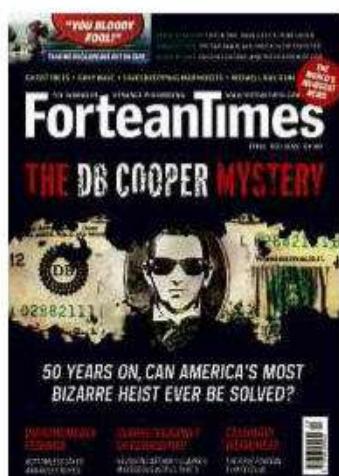
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BANKNOTE:
HERITAGE AUCTIONS

EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



LEAP INTO LEGEND

Welcome to our penultimate issue of 2021, in which we mark a pair of notable 50th anniversaries. November 1971 witnessed one of the strangest and most audacious heists in modern history, when a mysterious man wearing a now iconic dark suit and sunglasses hijacked a Northwest Airlines Boeing 727, demanded and received \$200,000 in ransom money (well over \$1million today) and jumped from the aircraft somewhere over Washington State, loaded with banknotes and never to be seen again. We all love an unsolved mystery, and the unidentified skyjacker who became known as “DB Cooper” entered the realm of modern myth, joining other prominent figures – Jack the Ripper, Amelia Earhart, Jimmy Hoffa, and Elvis Presley – who vanished into history, died mysteriously (or perhaps not at all) and entered a sort of twilight zone of endless speculation about their true identities and ultimate fates. Brian J Robb (p30) tells the whole improbable story of Cooper’s leap into legend, detailing the events of that day in November 1971, the lengthy FBI investigation, the tantalising clues and the parade of bizarre suspects. This is a particularly fortean line-up, of copycats and wannabees, small time crooks and army vets, individuals fingered by their own families (sometimes post mortem) or who boasted of being the now quasi-mythical “DB Cooper”. If anyone doubts that status, Cooper’s place in popular culture was surely cemented by his appearance in Marvel’s *Loki* earlier this year, where he was revealed to be none other than the God of Mischief himself.

It’s also 50 years this month since the publication of a key text of 1970s forteana and a gateway drug into weirdness for many readers of a certain age – Colin Wilson’s doorstep-sized *The Occult*, an ambitious (some would say

Quixotic) attempt to survey the whole field of the anomalous and supernatural and synthesise this unruly mass of material into a kind of occult “theory of everything”. How does Wilson’s *magnum opus* stand up half a century on? Turn to p54 to see what the Hierophant’s Apprentice has to say, and do share your own thoughts with us in the letters pages.

ERRATA

409:8: In this issue’s ‘Covid Corner’ we referred to “Kim-Kong-un”. While some might argue that the North Korean dictator is a bit of a monster, he bears no resemblance to a certain outsized ape and is actually called Kim-Jong-un. Rob Gandy was worried that “FT subscribers in North Korea might be in trouble.”

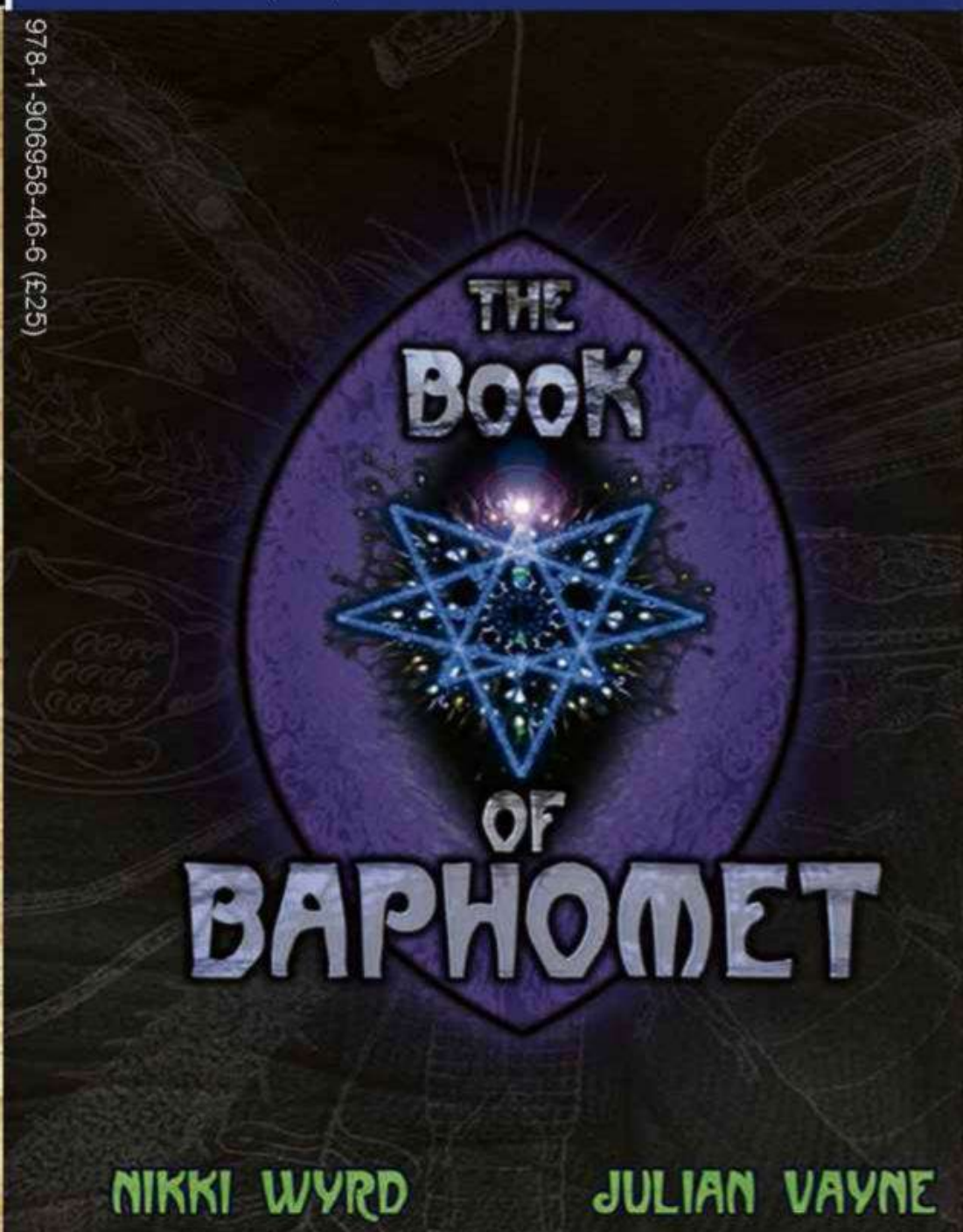
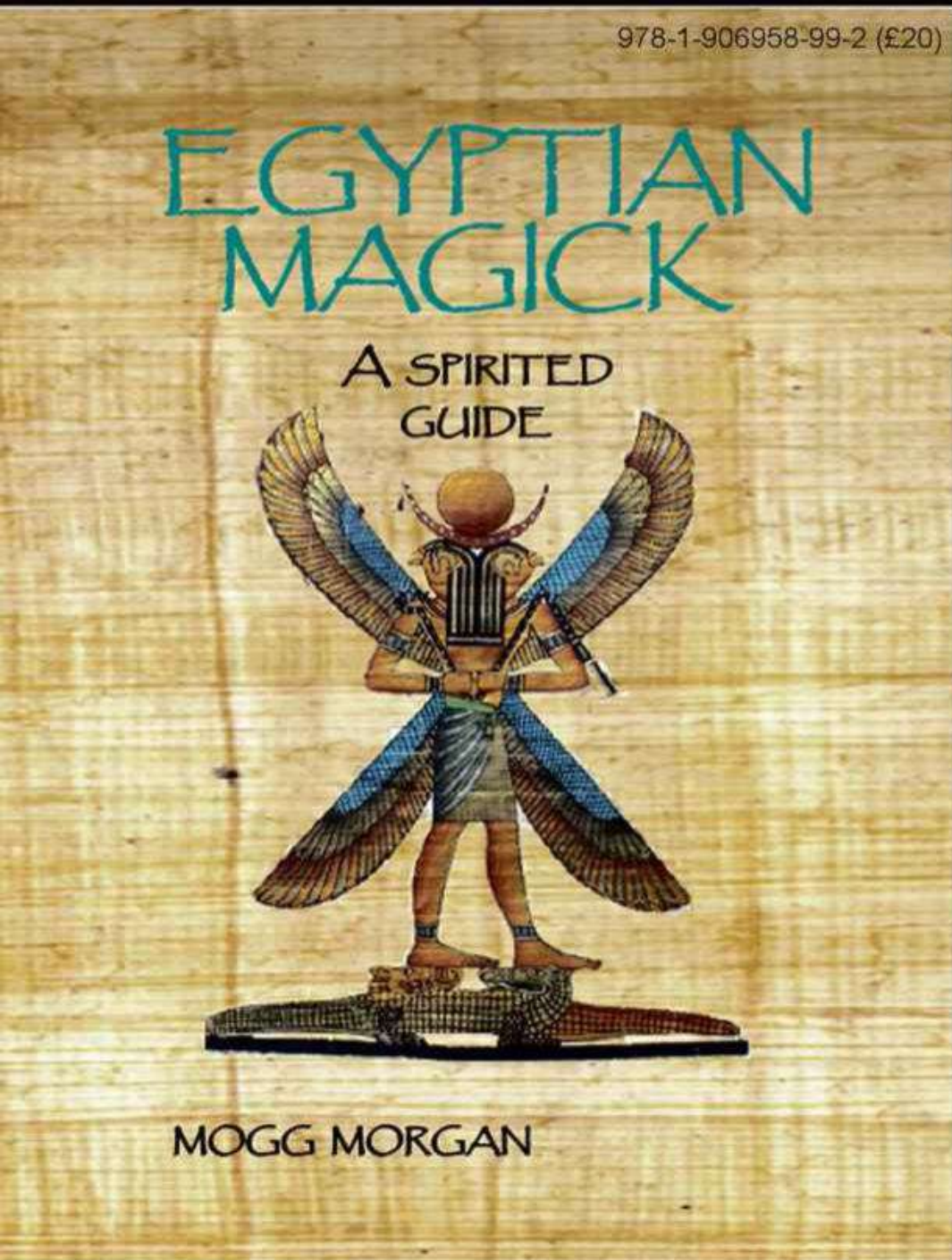
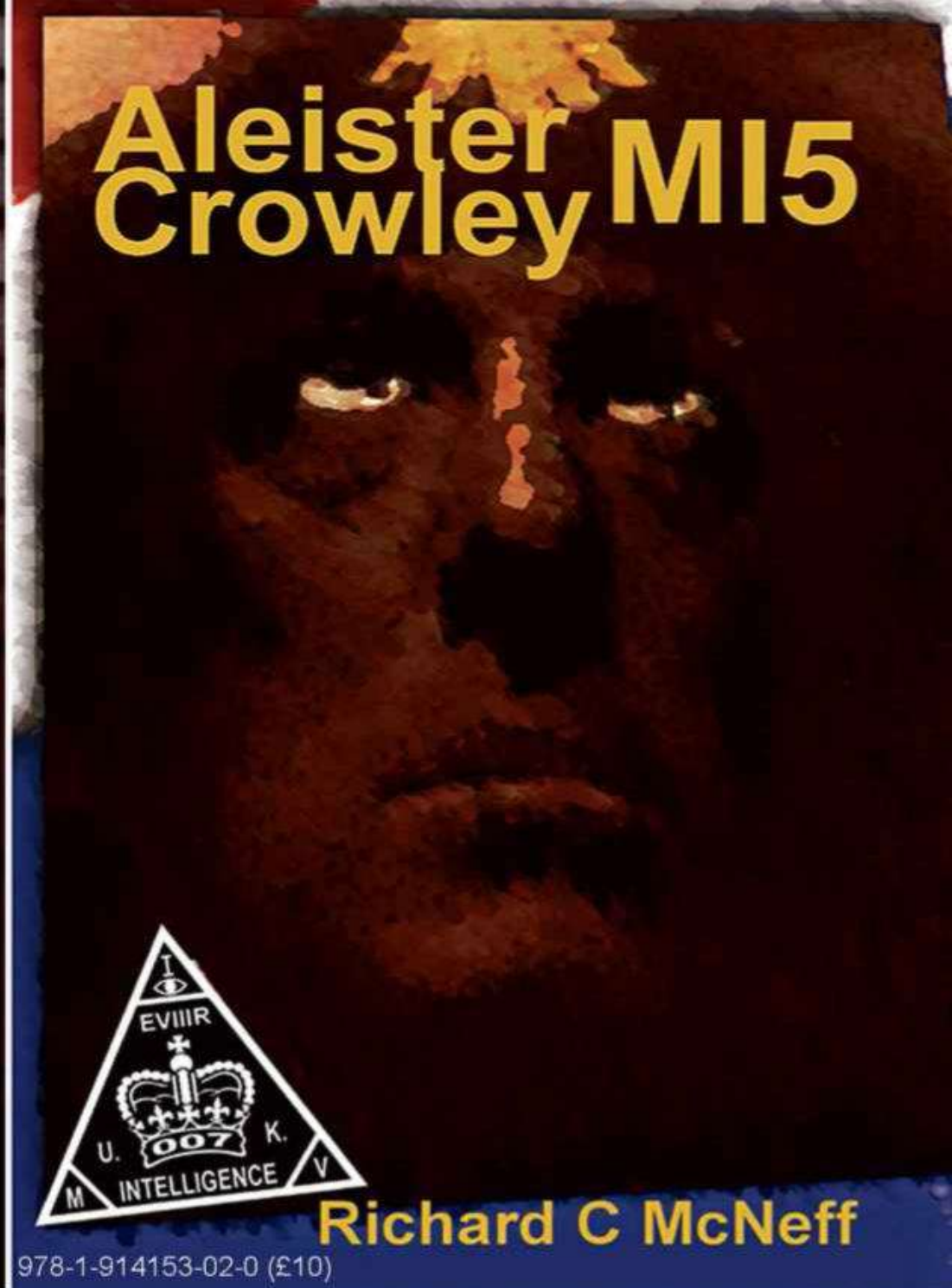
409:63: Another nominative slip in the same issue saw screenwriter Dan O’Bannon (of *Alien* fame) described as “Dan O’Cannon”. Thanks to our old friend Steve Volk for pointing that one out on Twitter for all to see (it was also spotted by Tom Ruffles).



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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

RAT KING CAUGHT ON VIDEO

Russian farmer makes a rare find and uploads footage to Instagram

While “squirrel kings” have been reported on a number of occasions in recent years (see **FT300:14, 355:25, 373:9, 383:9**), with the most recent one, involving seven baby squirrels in Grand Blanc, Michigan, in October, true rat kings – balls of rats with their tails knotted together – seem to be much rarer. Only around 30 rat kings have been recorded in the last 500 years as compared to 17 squirrel kings in the US alone since 1989. The last rat king on record was found in Estonia in 2005 and consisted of 16 rats, nine of which were still alive; they were found in a shed in Saru with their tails tangled in a ball of frozen sand. It is now preserved in the Natural History Museum in Tartu (see **FT383:9**). Now, another has turned up, found by farmer Alibulat Rasulov while surveying flooding in his fields near Stavropol in southwest Russia, with its discovery documented by two videos posted on Instagram.

The first video shows a drainage ditch across a flat, flooded, field and is about three minutes long. As Rasulov pans across the flood damage he spots something wriggling in the vegetation at the edge of the channel and zooms in on it. He pushes the vegetation aside revealing two flooded holes that look like rodent burrows, and just outside them a clump of five soaking wet juvenile rats with their tails knotted together and twined in the vegetation. Picking up the rats, he frees them from the plants and places them on dry land, but while they scrabble to escape, they are



TOP: The rat king filmed by farmer Alibulat Rasulov. **ABOVE:** A rat king found in 1895 in Germany, now preserved in the Zoological Museum in Strasbourg, France.

thwarted by their inextricably knotted tails. In the second video, around 30 seconds long, Rasulov has placed the rats on a white background and goes about disentangling their tails, which he does successfully, allowing all five rats to scamper to freedom. This is the first film of a live rat king, and the first of one’s discovery, which goes some way to dispelling the persistent suspicion that previous specimens have been hoaxed, although some might question the coincidence of their discovery taking place on film.

The location of their discovery also marks this rat king out as unusual. It was discovered in open ground next to what looks like rat burrows, rather than in buildings. That suggests these are brown rats (*Rattus norvegicus*), which burrow and will live in open country, and not black rats (*Rattus rattus*), which do not burrow and live in trees or buildings. Although the rats in this king look black, it is not possible to identify the species by colour alone; there are black rats that are light brown and brown rats that are almost black. Previous rat kings, where the species has been mentioned, have all consisted of black rats and been found in buildings, not open country. That may be because their presence in buildings makes it more likely that people will find them, while kings among brown rats in outdoor burrows would be much less likely to be discovered. It is also an outlier when it comes to location; by far the majority of rat kings come from northern Europe, mostly Germany and neighbouring countries, although Java and New Zealand claim one each. *Livescience.com*, 20 Sept; *mlive.com*, 2 Oct 2021.

ALIBULAT RASULOV

EDELSEIDER / LÄMPEL / CREATIVE COMMONS



CELLULOID WEIRDNESS

Highlights from the first Fortean Film Festival

PAGE 12



ANIMAL ATTACKS

Bothersome boars and offensive otters

PAGE 21



INVASION EARTH

Is signalling aliens such a good idea?

PAGE 28

BLACK MAGIC AND ATTACK IGUANAS

Wrangles over a dead depot's resting place, plus an industrialist's killer pets



ABOVE LEFT: A guard stands watch over Robert Mugabe's coffin. ABOVE RIGHT: Irénée du Pont pats an iguana on his Cuban estate.

MAGIC MUGABE

When Zimbabwean despot Robert Mugabe died in 2019, age 95, he gave orders that he should be buried on the family homestead in the village where he grew up, an hour outside Harare, thwarting his successor Emmerson Mnangagwa's plan for him to be laid to rest in a national monument. To make sure he stayed there, the family interred him in a steel coffin and filled the grave with concrete. Before his death, Mugabe had insisted his wife, Grace, remain with his body until burial as he believed it was at risk of being used "for rituals or witchcraft" by his former colleagues in the Zanu-PF party.

Opponents of Mugabe's chosen burial site were not finished though. In May 2021, two years on, a traditional court found Grace Mugabe guilty of breaking traditional norms by burying her husband in his home and said that the former president "shall be exhumed and reburied at the National Heroes Acre in Harare within 30 days or before the 1st of June 2021," a move that

To make sure he stayed there, they interred him in a steel coffin

his nephew Patrick Zhuwawu decried as having occult motives. He said it was "a desperate bid" by Zanu-PF leaders to obtain a mystic sceptre known as *tsvimbo yaMambo*: "There is an obsession with this sceptre that they believe conferred on Robert Mugabe special powers. It was always talked about, but I don't believe it ever existed and certainly was not buried with him." Zhuwawu believes growing economic chaos and a general election due in 2023 are making the Zimbabwean leadership increasingly reliant on superstition, leading to this latest exhumation attempt. "President Mugabe was a Catholic and did

not believe in the occult like other members of the party," he said.

Grace Mugabe refused to attend the hearing, and so was fined five cows and a goat. The family rejected the ruling and lodged an appeal against it – so, for the moment, Robert Mugabe is staying put. (For more on Mugabe, see FT328:48-50.) *Times*, 17 May; *voazimbabwe.com*, 6 June 2021.

SO, MR BOND...

Irénée du Pont (1876-1963), former President of the DuPont chemical company, collected a pack of trained iguanas up to 3ft (0.9m) long at his mansion in pre-revolutionary Cuba. Du Pont, reputedly an extreme right-wing, racist, anti-Semite, regularly walked them on leashes and on command could make them rush from their pens and surround him, standing to attention; on another command they would attack to kill. *boingboing.net*, 8 Sept 2021.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BEXHILL RESIDENT AGED 89 DIES SUDDENLY

Bexhill News, – May 1982.

Dragons all fired up by pandemic

D.Mirror, 1 April 2021.

ONLINE TROLLS ACTUALLY JUST ASSHOLES ALL THE TIME, STUDY FINDS

gizmodo.com, 27 Aug 2021.

China may be using sea to hide its submarines

Source & date unknown.

PIGEON POSTPONES APPEARANCE ON BUFFALO RADIO TALK SHOW

Buffalo (NY) News, 15 June 2021.

Female octopuses hurl projectiles to fend off mates

D.Telegraph, 28 Aug 2021.



SIDELINES...

BEAVERS AGAIN

Tipped off by finding orange tape used to secure cables on top of a beaver dam, technicians seeking the cause of disruption to the TV and Internet service in the remote Canadian town of Tumbler Ridge found that the rodents had dug down more than a metre to where the cables were buried and had chewed through them in several places. Predictably, a spokesperson for Telus, the Internet provider, described the incident as “a very Canadian turn of events.” *<i>, 29 Apr 2021.*

IT'S ART

Danish artist Jens Haaning was loaned £62,500 by the Kunsten Museum of Modern Art in Aalborg to recreate two early works featuring cash in picture frames. When they opened the crate, though, they found two empty frames. An email from the artist said that he thought it was more interesting to do a new work called *Take the Money and Run*. The museum is hoping he will return the money at the end of the exhibition as promised, but Haaning says: “Of course I will not pay it back. The work is that I took the money, and I will not give it back.” *UPI.com, 28 Sept 2021.*

OREO ACHIEVEMENT

Ohio social media influencer Ross Smith collaborated with his 95-year-old grandmother to claim the world record for the largest Oreo ever made, creating one that was 4ft (1.2m) wide and weighed 175lb (79kg), comfortably beating the existing record of 160lb (73kg). The record-breaking Oreo is more than 7,024 times the size of a regular one. “Hopefully we will be able to finish this thing off in a few months... before it goes stale,” said Smith. *ABC6 News, 6 Aug 2021.*



ALIEN ENCOUNTERS

The search for extraterrestrial life continues apace



LEFT: Physicist Avi Loeb of Harvard University has announced Project Galileo to search for intelligent ET life.

PROJECT GALILEO

If you want to be more ambitious and look for intelligent extraterrestrials, theoretical physicist Avi Loeb of Harvard University has announced a new project to search for alien visitors to the Solar System by looking for their technosignatures (traces of technology). Loeb is best known for his suggestion that the cigar-shaped interstellar object dubbed ‘Oumuamua, that whizzed through the Solar System in 2017, might be some kind of alien object – a light sail, antenna, or maybe a spaceship (see **FT404:14**).

Named Project Galileo (see **FT410:30**), this new venture came about as a result of several wealthy individuals reading Loeb’s book *Extraterrestrial: The First Sign of Intelligent Life Beyond Earth* and getting in touch with him to offer support. Four of them have now provided \$1.75 million to set up a systematic search for objects lurking in our immediate neighbourhood that could be the product of extraterrestrial intelligences; the project, though, ultimately aims to raise at least 10 times this amount.

Project Galileo has already recruited several well-known astronomers and researchers from other fields, although Loeb admits not everyone he approached responded positively. “The science community should be open-minded. That’s how we make progress,” he said. They intend to use a combination of existing telescopes and ones currently under construction to scan the Solar System for the arrival of ‘Oumuamua-like objects so that astronomers have longer to study them. ‘Oumuamua was only found as it was on its way out of the Solar System, meaning there was only a two-month window to study it before it was out of range. Loeb also hopes to design and build a launch-ready mission, either with agencies like NASA or private companies, to be sent to the next

METHANOGENESIS

In recent months, the scientific search for extraterrestrial life has been hotting up. Researchers examining data from the 2005 Cassini mission to Saturn have drastically increased the probability that there could be life on one of its moons, Enceladus. Enceladus has a completely frozen surface, but it is thought that a huge ocean of liquid water hides beneath this. At the moon’s south pole there are fractures in the ice, and Cassini found these had geysers blasting water ice and a wide range of chemicals from them which it was able to sample. The chemicals included dihydrogen (H^2), carbon dioxide (CO^2) and methane (CH^4), which are of considerable interest to astrobiologists searching for life, particularly as Enceladus was producing far more methane than expected.

On Earth, there are microbes that make methane by combining dihydrogen and

carbon dioxide by a process known as methanogenesis. Régis Ferrière, an associate professor in the University of Arizona’s Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and his team have now run simulations to assess the probability that Enceladus’s methane was of biological origin. What they found was that physical reactions on the moon could produce some methane, but nowhere near enough to account for the amount found by Cassini. When they factored in the potential amount that could be produced by methanogenesis in micro-organisms, though, they nicely matched what Cassini had observed. While inorganic processes not observed on Earth could be making this extra methane, Ferrière said that “biological methanogenesis appears to be compatible with the data – in other words, we can’t discard the ‘life hypothesis’ as highly improbable.” *space.com, 7 July 2021.*



'Oumuamua-like object to arrive.

In addition to searching for transient objects zipping through our Solar System, Project Galileo will have two other strands. Firstly, they want to take a closer look at UAP phenomena, following the recent US Government report on them (see **FT409:48-53**), to see if they might reveal an extraterrestrial origin. "The Government is the most conservative organisation you can think about... for it to admit that it doesn't know what UAPs are is a very significant statement," said Loeb. Secondly, they want to look closely at objects orbiting the Earth to see if any turn out to be alien satellites; this would be done by using artificial intelligence to analyse data from existing survey telescopes that track orbiting objects larger than 10cm (4in) in size.

Critics have pointed out that there are existing projects that essentially do most of what Project Galileo plans to, and that there is no evidence that UAPs have any connection with extraterrestrials. Alan Fitzsimmons of Queen's University Belfast, co-leader of the International Space Science Institute's 'Oumuamua investigation team, welcomed some aspects of Project Galileo but said, "OK, that's bollocks," about the UAP element. Loeb has



ABOVE: 'Oumuamua passed through our Solar System back in 2017.

characterised some colleagues as blinkered and prejudiced against the search for technosignatures, but acknowledges that his quest "takes people out of their comfort zone".

However, Project Galileo is still relatively conservative in its aims – they will not be considering fringe science like zero-point energy as possible explanations for UAP behaviour, intending to stick to known physics, and they will not be doing retrospective investigations, so cases like Roswell and Rendlesham remain firmly outside their remit, as do alien abductions. They will be insisting on complete transparency, so will not be using military data that comes with confidentiality requirements, and will be publishing all their findings in peer-reviewed, publicly available journals, assuming any will have them. *Science*, 26 July 2021.

TIKTOK TIME TRAVELLER

The Project Galileo team may not have long to wait if someone making waves on TikTok is right. @futuretimetraveller claims to be exactly that – a time traveller from the future, 2491 in fact. Like jazz legend Sun Ra, they also claim to have been born on the gas giant Saturn, although they say they are still human. In a video that does not show @futuretimetraveller's face, just clouds and text, they claim that aliens will arrive on Earth on 24 May 2022. Apparently, they will be "7 foot 4" tall, with "long shaped skulls", a "dark grey" complexion and "distorted appearance". The video, which has been viewed over 90,000 times, explains that "This group of Aliens are called Nirons and come in peace and don't mean to harm." The US, however, ends up attacking the Nirons, starting the first of several "interdimensional wars", which Earth loses with disastrous consequences. *Ladbible.com*, 9 July 2021.

SIDELINES...

DEATH FROM ABOVE

Hundreds of dead ravens have been falling from the sky in the village of Ust-Tarka in southwest Siberia. Other birds seem to be unharmed, but there have been "several hundred deaths per day" among the local raven population. Sergei Kuzlyakin, chief physician of the Ust-Tarsk veterinary department, suspected poisoning but said: "I have been working as a doctor since 1975 and this is the first time I've seen this. I am shocked." Samples have been sent to Novosibirsk for analysis. *mirror.co.uk*, 28 Sept 2021.

COMA COP

Constable Reuben Kimutai Lei, a Kenyan policeman, woke from a nine-month coma to find he had been sacked for deserting his post and that a warrant had been issued for his arrest. Until he awoke and was able to tell medics who he was, Constable Lei's identity was unknown as he had no documents on him when he was involved in the road accident that left him comatose. His family had searched for him for months and had given him up for dead. He was discharged from hospital to recuperate at home and the police have agreed to reinstate him. *BBC News*, 25 Sept 2021.

NEW LANDS

Bristol resident Robert Craig is campaigning for a new country to be set up in Britain, with Bristol as its capital. Craig, 79, wants the West Country, Sussex and Essex to be united as "Saxland" based on the region briefly ruled by King Ecgberht in 824. He wants to combine London and Kent as another country and leave the rest of Britain as it is. He sees this as an answer to current London-centricism. Mr Craig stood for MP for Bath on this platform in the 2010 election, but got the fewest votes of any candidate in the country. *bristolpost.co.uk*, 14 Sept 2021.

BEE-HAVIOUR

Researchers have found that bees are attracted to plants laced with caffeine and that the substance makes them more focused, motivated and efficient at gathering nectar. They believe that this could help save at-risk bee species and improve crop fertilisation. *Metro*, 29 July 2021.

MOONBOW

This stunning image shows the Moon surrounded by a celestial rainbow. The rare phenomenon – known as a lunar corona – occurs when light reflecting off the Moon's silvery surface is split by water particles or ice crystals in the air, creating a rainbow or halo effect. The image was captured by photographer Alberto Ghizzi Panizza, 45, near the northern Italian city of Parma. **PHOTO:** Alberto Ghizzi Panizza/SWNS.





SIDELINES...

TRYING IT OM

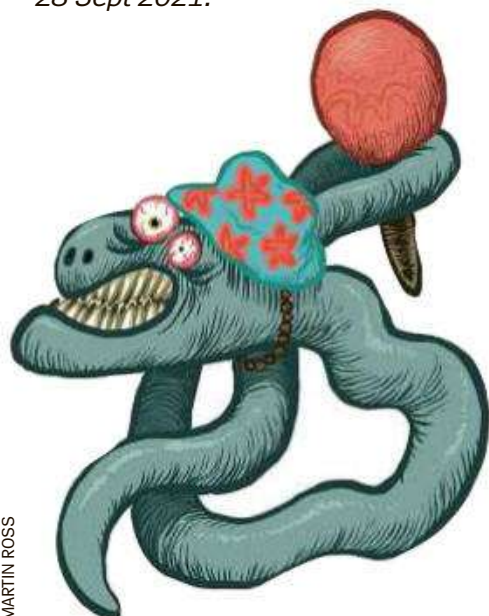
A study by the tax office has shown that items companies have claimed on expenses include live lobsters, an adult-size pink tutu, lederhosen, sex toys, a cremation and a tantric workshop session. The Accountancy Partnership said, “expenses that occur due to business circumstances are allowable... no matter how dubious they may seem.” *Sun*, 15 July 2021.

CLOSE SHAVE

While relaxing on the patio at Sedgefield Country Club in North Carolina, a 57-year-old golfer felt a stinging sensation on the side of his head but shrugged it off as an insect bite. It was only when fellow golfers pointed out that he was bleeding, and picked up a bullet nearby, that he realised this is what had grazed him. No one at the scene remembers hearing a gunshot and Sheriff’s spokesperson Lori Poag said: “It appears the shooting was accidental, possibly from a bullet fired into the air some distance away.” *D.Mail*, 12 June 2021.

STOMED EELS

Scientists have urged Glastonbury festivalgoers to use on-site toilets rather than urinating in the fields after research found “dangerous” levels of MDMA and cocaine in the Whitelake River that flows through the festival site. Measurements both upstream and downstream of the site were taken before, during and after the festival in 2019 and revealed the concentration of drugs in the river quadrupled in the week after the festival. The river is home to rare European eels and scientists fear that the effects of the drugs on the fish could derail conservation efforts. *BBC News*, 28 Sept 2021.



MARTIN ROSS

HUMAN QUADRUPEDS

A four-legged feat and some very odd videos



ABOVE: The scuttling, crablike figure filmed in Costa Rica – prank or Monkey Witch? BELOW: The “Dog Girl from Tamaulipas”.

In Canada, Julie McCann, 38, of Vernon, British Columbia, has set an unofficial world record for running on all fours. On 10 August she completed the 100ms (328ft) in 22.99 seconds, comfortably beating the official Guinness Women’s World Record of 25 seconds. Mrs McCann, who has been running on all fours since she was three, was inspired to make an attempt on the women’s world record after reading about Kenichi Ito of Japan setting the men’s record of 15.71 seconds in 2015. She is now submitting video and witness reports of her feat to Guinness to try to get her record formally recognised. *[UPI]* 10 Aug 2021.

Meanwhile, two strange videos have recently been doing the rounds online, purporting to show humans, or humanoids, running bizarrely on all fours. The first was allegedly recorded on a home security system in Costa Rica and shared by a pseudonymous poster on Reddit (see youtu.be/bCVcHPNcNRs) and seems to show a human-sized figure scuttling around on all fours in a crablike manner. Shot at night, the video shows the figure entering the screen from the left, sidling across a dimly lit road, and disappearing off to the right, attracting the attention of several dogs that react in a disturbed manner, shying away from the “crab” and barking at it. It then scurries back into shot and runs along the road to disappear off the bottom of the screen. As the entity is wreathed in shadow throughout, it is impossible to make out any features that might identify it. Speculation about the being’s identity ranges

A human-sized figure scuttling around in a crablike manner



from a harmless eccentric, a drunken prankster – although it shows impressive co-ordination for anyone who has been drinking – or a fast-moving sloth, to a manifestation of La Mona, an entity also known as the Dwarf or Monkey Witch. In the mythology of Costa Rica’s Chorotega people, these are witches who could transform into monstrous monkeys to move at high speed through the trees, bringing grief to their enemies. Other Reddit commentators raise the low resolution, weird aspect ratios and heavy compression of the video as indicators that it might be faked but, as with many pieces of forteen evidence, the anonymity of the original source makes any definitive resolution of the mystery almost impossible.

The second video shows what appears to be a very skinny naked person, probably female, running

along a pavement on all fours, dexterously and at a considerable speed. The video, again shot at night on security cameras, features recordings from three consecutive cameras that pick up the person running down a path along a street and round a corner before disappearing off screen (see youtu.be/rNhXj9ZMt3o). The video was entitled “Dog Girl from Tamaulipas” and was most likely shot in Mexico, as the title suggests. Again, suggestions have varied from the highly speculative – a werewolf – to the more plausible suggestion that this is someone with Uner

Tan syndrome. This is a developmental disorder that results in severe learning disabilities and an inability to walk bipedally. Most famously, this was experienced by a family in southern Turkey

who were the subject of a BBC documentary *The Family That Walks on All Fours* (see **FT210:24**), although they show nowhere near the running skills or turn of speed that the person in the video does. One source suggests this is an unnamed girl with Uner Tan syndrome who was discovered in 2009 in the Ampliacion Unidad Nacional area of Tamaulipas who is normally kept secluded by her family, and that the video comes from cameras used to monitor her safety – although why she is emaciated, naked and apparently running in the street is not explained. *coasttocoastam.com*, 26 Apr; *ordonews.com*, 4 Aug; *themotherofallnerds.com*, 19 Oct 2020.



GIMP WAVE

Somerset's infamous Gimp Man may be on the move, while Michael Myers terrorises Texas

- In April, the New Forest was haunted by someone in a gimp suit. Hampshire police were looking for "a naked man wearing bondage gear" after someone described simultaneously as being "naked" and as wearing "bondage clothing, boots and a green rucksack" was spotted in the early afternoon near Bolton's Bench, a beauty spot close to Lyndhurst. Unsurprisingly, the police said: "Our officers conducted a search of the area, but were unable to locate any individual matching the description provided to us." Locals, meanwhile, speculated that the individual was filming content for OnlyFans, a subscription website where people can commission bespoke film clips, often sexual, from amateurs in return for cash. *D.Star*, 1 April 2021.

- In early September, motorists driving along the A343 in Highclere, Hampshire, were treated to the sight of a man wearing nothing but a latex gimp mask standing in a layby watching traffic. "He was just staring at the traffic, like a horror movie, and then when we drove past again after turning round, he was running off," said motorist Craig Upton, from Andover, who called police after sighting the naked man and seeing him escape into woods behind the layby. *D.Star*, 8 Sept 2021.

- It's possible that these sightings involved the same gimp who has been frequently reported from the village of Claverham in Somerset (see FT384:24). His latest manifestation was on 1 September, when he was seen lying in a garden spying on a couple through their French windows as they watched TV in the early hours of the morning. The husband gave chase and the individual "legged it". Police were called, but again failed to find the man.

In 2019, a woman, named only as Abi, 25, was terrified when a gimp charged at her late at night in Claverham, saying that he was "coming towards me and was touching his groin, grunting



TOP: The mysterious Claverham Gimp Man, photographed in 2019. ABOVE: A Michael Myers lookalike is arrested on the beach in Galveston; it turned out to be lawyer Mark Metzger (inset) trying to spread "a little bit of positivity".

and breathing heavy." Since late 2018, there have been 14 reports from Claverham of a man wearing disguises jumping out at people at night and more recently people had reported "weird things happening" in the village. Following the 2019 incident, two men, aged 28 and 34, were arrested on suspicion of indecency offences but were released for lack of evidence. Police say they are "keeping an open mind" as to whether the two incidents are connected, but according to a local woman, who wished to remain anonymous, local children were saying "it's the gimp man again." *BBC News*, 11 Sept; *dailymail.co.uk*, 11 Sept 2021.

- Police in Galveston, Texas, had better luck when they received reports of a man dressed as the *Halloween* film villain Michael Myers, complete with mask and bloodstained knife, walking along the beach in the early stages of Hurricane Nicholas's landfall in the area. Arriving at the beach, they arrested the mask-wearer, lawyer Mark Metzger, and charged him with disorderly conduct. Metzger said he did it for "a little bit of positivity in the gloomy doom," adding that "it felt like a scene out of Scooby-Doo after they handcuffed me and pulled the mask off, like, 'I would have gotten away with it if wasn't for those meddling Karens', you know?" *abc13.com*, 14 Sept 2021.

SIDELINES...

PARCEL SURPRISE

An unopened parcel found during a house clearance in Rolleston-on-Dove, Staffordshire, turned out to date from the 1940s and contained a wartime RAF dress uniform in pristine condition. The uniform, with the insignia for a senior aircraftman, was expected to fetch several hundred pounds at auction. *Yorkshire Post*, 14 Aug 2021.

SMAIL SUCCESS

Scientist Dr Angus Davison from Nottingham University has finally managed to raise another snail with a left-hand coil to its shell to mate with one his lab had previously produced. He had hatched more than 10,000 snails before he found a second anticlockwise one. Left-hand coil snails have difficulty mating with right-hand ones because their genitals are on the wrong side. *<i> 7 April 2021.*

GOAT AFLOAT

Police in Georgia in the US are investigating a spate of headless goat carcasses floating down the Chattahoochee River. Environmentalist Jason Ulseth said: "Over the past couple of years, I've seen a couple hundred, but never more than 20 to 30 at one given time like we've started to see here lately." Police have failed to find any leads, despite sightings of goat carcasses being dumped from bridges in broad daylight, and they haven't been able to pinpoint anyone who might be supplying the goats. They believe, however, that the animals are being sacrificed by local Santeria cultists as they are believed to include goat sacrifice in their rituals. *D.Star*, 31 Aug 2021.

URBAMFARM

Police in New Jersey raided Emilio Otero's three-bedroom apartment after a tip off from neighbours that Otero, a doctor, was keeping animals there and sacrificing them in Santeria rituals. Environmental health officers found 22 animals on the property, including "seven to nine" goats, chickens, and a dead pigeon nailed above a door. Five chickens were also found in a pile with their throats cut. Otero denied sacrificing animals and maintained he kills them legally for food, but an environmental health spokesperson pointed out that "Jersey City... prohibits residents from keeping farm animals, livestock, in the city limits." *D.Star*, 21 Aug 2021.



SIDELINES...

OOPS!

A South Korean couple were arrested for damaging an artwork by graffiti artist JonOne after they mistook it for a piece of participatory art and made their own contribution to it. The 240cm (8ft) by 700cm (23ft) work was created by JonOne in front of a live audience in 2016 and paint cans and brushes from the performance are displayed in front of the painting wherever it is shown as they are considered part of the artwork. After reviewing CCTV, the gallery decided not to file charges as it was an honest mistake; they put up a barrier and “do not touch” signs instead. *3 April 2021.*

MOMK ATTACK

Police in southern France have arrested two Catholic monks while they were trying to set fire to a 5G mobile phone mast. The monks, from a Capuchin monastery, had carried out a similar attack the night before, but only caused minor damage. Charged with “damage and attempted damage with an incendiary device”, the monks said they wanted to “to warn the population against the harmful effects of 5G” and to “act for the well-being of humanity”. Despite extensive research, there is no evidence that wireless technologies like 5G are harmful. *theregister.com, 22 Sept 2021.*

MUMFUM

A woman dressed as a nun was photographed dancing with a skeleton outside Hull General Cemetery at midday on a Saturday alongside a busy main road. The “nun”, wearing a cream habit and a coif headpiece, was seen dancing with the skeleton as well as playing with what looked like a dog skeleton. A witness said: “It was clearly attracting a lot of attention with people stopping to watch nearby and people in their cars looking.” *hulldailymail.co.uk, 12 Sept 2021.*



MARTIN ROSS

CRITTER CHATTER | Talking duck tape discovered, plus marmoset conversations



JJ HARRISON / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: “You bloody fool!” said Ripper the musk duck.

TALKING DUCK

New research published in the journal *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* documents the first ever scientific evidence of a talking duck. The duck, a male musk duck named ‘Ripper’, hand-reared in captivity at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve near Canberra, Australia, was recorded saying the phrase “you bloody fool” repeatedly. In the recordings, made 30 years ago by retired researcher Dr Peter Fulgar, Ripper can also be heard imitating the sound of a door slamming.

Dr Fulgar’s recordings resurfaced recently after Professor Carel ten Cate of Leiden University came across a brief mention of them in a book on bird vocalisations and followed the reference up. Initially believing it was a hoax, he was convinced after hearing the recordings. He also unearthed Dr Fulgar’s recordings of a second Tidbinbilla musk duck imitating the call of another duck species. While further investigation didn’t turn up any more talking ducks, ten Cate did find evidence of a musk duck at Pensthorpe Natural Park in the UK that had been heard imitating the sounds of “coughing, and a snorting pony” and one at Slimbridge Wildfowl Trust, also in the UK, that could replicate its keeper’s cough and the squeak of a turnstile. This is the first time mimicry has been confirmed in a duck species, although

some songbirds, crows, parrots and hummingbirds also do it. The rather creepy recording of Ripper speaking can be found on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46RSYCXwSXo>. *Irishexaminer.com, 7 Sept 2021.*

EAVESDROPPING MARMOSETS

The forests of north-eastern Brazil are home to the common marmoset (*Callithrix jacchus*). Like squirrels, they spend a good deal of their time in trees, and are similar in size. They have a sophisticated social structure with extended families of up to 15 marmosets living, eating, and hanging out together. However, while there are only one or two breeding pairs within each group, it seems that when the babies are born the whole clan take turns in caring for the youngsters. Because marmosets rely on others for help, they have to evaluate who will (or won’t) be reliable in terms of cooperation and mutual support. New research by Judith Burkart and Rahel Brügger, evolutionary anthropologists at the University of Zurich, demonstrates the miniature primates will eavesdrop on the conversations of other marmosets in order to assess them based on what they are “saying”. Essentially, they prefer to mingle with those they feel will make the best nannies for their young.

Burkart and Brügger placed a single

marmoset in a room and played it recordings of marmoset vocalisations from a hidden speaker. The chatter might be that of a positive interaction, an infant calling for food and an adult responding gently, for example; or it might be a negative one, with the adult reacting aggressively to the hungry baby. As a control, the scientists only played back recordings from a single animal.

They then focused an infrared camera on the faces of the marmosets, to record the temperature of their noses: a drop in nasal temperature would indicate that the marmoset was alert and engaged. Initial findings indicated that the animals became aroused during the combined calls but not during the individual vocalisations, which told the researchers they were reacting to “conversations”.

Next, the scientists let the marmosets into an adjoining room containing toys and a mirror. Since they don’t recognise their own reflections, marmosets are likely to approach a mirror and socialise with the image. The experiment was arranged so that the animals would assume the calls that they’d just heard were coming from the individual reflected in the mirror. After hearing a positive interaction played back, the marmosets readily entered the room and ran up to the mirror, ready to socialise with the stranger – but after the negative, uncooperative vocalisations, the marmosets were hesitant to approach the reflection: they preferred interacting with a “stranger” who was cooperative, which indicates that they aren’t just passive observers, but make decisions about others based on what they hear – just as humans do. The team plan to build on

their success and use temperature-mapping to investigate bigger questions, such as the primate origin of human traits like morality. *sciencemag.org, 3 Feb 2021.*



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SPECIAL REPORT

THE FIRST FORTEAN FILM FESTIVAL

RICHARD FREEMAN, from the Centre for Fortean Zoology, reports from Gloucester on a wonderful weekend of celluloid weirdness



Tim Whittard and Matt Everett put together three little words: fortean, film and festival. Just four months later, over 90 film-makers from across the globe had submitted their work and the event had taken place. The venue was the Sherborne Cinema in Gloucester, where a panel of judges made up of scientists, fortean researchers and bloggers watched the best films over the weekend of 26-27 August.

Friday night was given over to that perennial fortean mystery, out of place big cats, with three films on the subject being shown.

Britain's Big Cat Mystery, written and directed by Matt Everett, was a spectacular start to the festival. This professional-looking feature-length documentary is beautifully shot and assesses a wide range of evidence. Dr Andrew Hemmings, a biologist from the Royal Agricultural Society, examines bones of alleged big cat victims and identifies tell-tale "tooth pits". This distinctive triangle of punctures in the bone are unique to the carnassial teeth of big cats, leading Hemmings to conclude that these are precisely what has been chewing on the remains.

The level-headed and sceptical genetic scientist Dr Todd Disotell identifies leopard DNA from a site in Devon and concludes that there really was a big cat in the area. Another man who could never be accused of jumping to rash conclusions is Dr Darren Naish, who says he is aware of leopard DNA collected from several areas of the UK, but the results have not been published. Elsewhere, a former exotic animal keeper confesses to releasing two big cats in the UK. Rob Guest, a biologist involved in the deer census, saw a panther on two occasions during his work. Paul Ramsden finds a half-eaten badger that has been dragged across a field; no native predator is capable of doing this. Perhaps the most convincing witness is former Royal Marine John Holden, one of the soldiers employed to hunt the Beast of Exmoor in the early 1980s as it cut a bloody swathe through local livestock. Holden relates how he watched the creature through night vision goggles as a fellow soldier attempted to shoot it and failed. Caryn Memory's 1999 film of a black cat is examined by zoologist Dr Isla Fishbourn,

who thinks it does show a big cat. More recently, in the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire, John Binley catches three images of what seems to be a huge cat. Trevor McKenzie, a former game warden from Zimbabwe, identifies it as a puma. I could go on: there are more witnesses and more evidence, but the upshot is that experts from many fields agree that there are big cats living in the UK. *Britain's Big Cat Mystery* is a triumph of cryptozoological film-making.

The Hunt: In Search of Australia's Big Cats, directed by Stu Ruse, is equally well made. Vaughan King, Simon Townsend and John Turner are three researchers looking into big cat sightings in Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales. Theories about American servicemen releasing big cat mascots in to the wilds of Australia after WWII are considered and many convincing witnesses interviewed. However, alleged puma vocalisations are clearly vixens calling, while livestock kills too big for a fox to take down are nevertheless contaminated by fox DNA after the creatures scavenged on the

carcasses. There may be something odd in the bush, but the evidence is not as strong as it is in the UK.

Cat Hunters focuses on just one area, Exmoor. Directed once more by Matt Everett and written by Matt and Tim Whittard, the film takes a more light-hearted approach, with an excitable narrator who sounds like Ray Winstone on speed. CFZ stalwarts naturalist Jon McGowan and zoologist Carl Marshall join South African tracker Rhoda Watkins and ecologist Jay Opie to make up the impressive team. One of the most interesting aspects of the film is the interview with a local couple who recall a farmer keeping two big cats and carting them around on a trailer at the back of his tractor. When they grew too big, he simply let them go.

The following day included fictional films as well as factual ones. *Ashens and the Polybius Heist*, the brainchild of successful YouTuber Stuart Ashen (or "Ashens"), tells the story of a legendary arcade game of the early 1980s that could control the player's mind. It's a very polished bit of work that lands like an extended episode of *Inside Number Nine*; and that's no bad thing.

The Bigfoot Alien Connection Revealed by Ron Meyer and Alan Megargle was the one turkey of the event: basically a UFO documentary with bigfoot tacked on. Imagine a double length episode of *Ancient Aliens* and you'll get the idea.

Fact or Fiction: The Norfolk Sea Creature, by Jordon Thomas Sendall and Kyle Ball, is a Pythonesque satire of fortean documentaries, with many of the witnesses and experts played by the same actors (on one occasion in drag) and a vox pop of confused holiday makers in Yarmouth.

Killing the Parson Bird is a superb short by Peter McCully, with dazzling location work in New Zealand. The story revolves around two men from Captain Cook's *Endeavour*. After the ship weighs anchor off the coast and sends boats ashore, the pair are tasked with hunting the parson bird, so called for the white markings about its neck. The bird evades them and lures them



deeper into the forest, where one of them is attacked and killed by Haast's eagle, a giant bird of prey that evolved to hunt the huge, flightless moa birds of the islands. The survivor, with his tale of a massive man-eating bird, is deemed insane and locked up by the crew.

Back to documentaries and Alexander Brecher's French language film *The Explorer* follows former lawyer Michel Ballot on a hunt for the legendary mokele-mbembe in the jungles of Central Africa. Ballot has been hunting the beast for 15 years. Some believe it to be a sauropod dinosaur but, if it exists, it is more likely to be a giant monitor lizard or huge soft-shelled turtle. Ballot heads for the Nik Falls along the Dja river between the Republic of Congo and Cameroon. One witness tells of seeing a 15m (50ft) beast with a long neck and tail and a massive body rising from the water. However, as the expedition continues, the main guide, who has not been to the area in 20 years, gets the team lost in the jungle. Finally, they make it to an uncharted island in the river and stumble across the tracks of a huge beast that has left the water. The team photograph them. Back in France, biologist Baerit Grison and his peers could not identify the tracks but thought they looked "reptilian". He doesn't find the beast, but you have to admire Ballot's grit and determination.

The final film of the night was John Williams's *Tales of the Creeping Death*, an Amicus-style anthology of four tales with a linking premise: an old man offers £20,000 to anyone who can sit with him all night on a certain date and prevent his death as he tells them four strange stories: a possessed dummy, blood-harvesting aliens, a jovial corpse collector and a bingo reading werewolf all feature. It's a thoroughly professional piece of work that made a fitting end to a great event. Matt and Tim should be congratulated on a wonderful weekend. They want the Fortean Film Festival to be an annual fixture and are already planning next year's event. I can't wait.



FACING PAGE: Festival organisers Tim Whittard and Matt Everett. **TOP:** Former Royal Marine John Holden is one of many impressive witnesses to ABCs on the prowl in *Britain's Big Cat Mystery*. **ABOVE CENTRE:** *Tales of the Creeping Death* is a superb homage to the portmanteau horror films of the Sixties and Seventies. **ABOVE:** *The Explorer* tells the story of lawyer Michel Ballot's 15-year search for the Congo's legendary mokele-mbembe.



PAUL DEVEREUX unearths ancient footprints, carved camels and a possible location for Sodom



WELLCOME COLLECTION.

A COSMIC BLAST?

Tall el-Hammam, a major Bronze Age city located in the Jordan Valley near the Dead Sea, was destroyed c.1650 BC by some kind of exceptional force, an event that has caused much speculation in recent years, some of it of the ‘ancient astronauts’ kind. Now, a new study offers a different perspective. After highly detailed analysis of several years of excavational findings at the site, the authors of an extremely technical and multi-disciplinary paper in *Nature Scientific Reports* conclude (though not without some critiques), that the only feasible explanation of the nature and scale of the city’s destruction is a “Tunguska-sized” airburst occasioned by a meteor or comet exploding about two to three miles (3-4km) above the area. Archaeologist Christopher R Moore, one of the study’s authors, paints a vivid picture of the devastation: “Air temperatures rapidly rose above 3,600 degrees Fahrenheit. Clothing and wood immediately burst into flames. Swords, spears, mudbricks and pottery began to melt... None of the 8,000 people or any animals within the city survived. Their bodies were torn apart and their bones blasted into small fragments. Almost immediately, the entire city was on fire.”



CHUANG ZHAO

TOP: Destruction rains down on Sodom as Lot and his family flee in a coloured lithograph after John Martin .
ABOVE: The site of the city of Tall el-Hammam, which appears to have suffered a similar fate c.1650 BC.

A shockwave tore through the city at about 740mph (1,190km/h). Some walls were sheared level to the foundations, ‘impact shocked’ quartz fragments in the soils were turned to diamond-like crystals, fragments of pottery vessels were untouched on the inside but melted on their exteriors, along with other extraordinary effects of the blast. High salt concentrations were found in the destruction levels of the

site, possibly resulting from the blast’s impact on the Dead Sea area, severely affecting agriculture. Tall el-Hammam and its vicinity remained unoccupied for some centuries after this catastrophe.

The biblical story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, with fire and brimstone raining down from the heavens, and Lot’s wife turning to a pillar of salt, is an obvious but contentious candidate for being,



at core, a folk memory of this exceptional disaster. *Nature Scientific Report* (<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-97778-3>), 20 Sept; *Smithsonian Magazine/Smart News*, 22 Sept 2021

COMING TO AMERICA

There has long been debate about when humans first arrived in the Americas, with most archaeological opinion settling on about 16,000 years ago, after the ice covering of much of North America in the last Ice Age receded, opening a land bridge with Siberia and migratory routes southwards through the continent. But new dating research on fossilised footprints uncovered at White Sands National Park in New Mexico, which was south of the advanced edge of the ice sheet, tells a whole other story and proves unequivocally human presence in the Americas to have been many thousands of years earlier.

We have previously mentioned in this column a set of fossilised human footprints (interspersed with tracks of now long extinct wild animals) at White Sands (**FT400:14**), but it turns out they are just one grouping out of several in the area. The latest research focuses on a group first discovered by David Bustos, resources manager at the park: the footprints had originally formed in soft mud on the margins of a shallow lake that now forms part of Alkali Flat, a large playa (dried-up desert basin) and became fossilised over the ages. Using a range of geophysical techniques, and radiocarbon dating of seed layers above and below the footprints, the researchers determine the tracks to be 23,000 years old – the oldest yet recorded in the Americas. Dates from

the footprints at White Sands range over a 2,000-year period, in fact, so showing sustained human presence. Going by their sizes, the footprints seem to have been made mainly by teenagers and younger children, with only a few by adults – perhaps family groups playing on the shores of the then extant lake. “We can think of our ancestors as quite functional, hunting and surviving, but what we see here is also activity of play, and of different ages coming together,” says Matthew Bennett of Bournemouth University who helped lead the study. The full significance of this study, though, is that it firmly establishes the need for a radical reappraisal of the chronology of humans in North America.

The footprint evidence suggests humans had made it to the North American interior by the Last Glacial Maximum, when massive ice sheets covered much of what is today Canada. This would have blocked entry to humans crossing from Asia, perhaps suggesting that humans arrived even earlier when pathways through the ice were open. Dr Andrea Manica, a geneticist from the University of Cambridge, said the finding had important implications for the population history of the Americas. “Firm evidence of humans in North America 23,000 years ago is at odds with the genetics, which clearly shows a split of Native Americans from Asians approximately 15-16,000 years ago,” he said. “This would suggest that the initial colonists of the Americas were replaced when the ice corridor formed and another wave of colonists came in. We have no idea how that happened.” *BBC News*, 23 Sept; *Science* (DOI:10.1126/science.abg7586), 24 Sept; *Guardian*, 26 Sept 2021.

LEFT: These life-size reliefs of camels in Arabia may be the oldest examples of such animal art in the world. **BELOW:** The oldest fossilised footprints in the US at White Sands National Park, New Mexico.



WHAT A RELIEF

In 2018, a series of life-size camel reliefs on three rocky spurs in northern Arabia were discovered, and initially thought to be about 2,000 years old. But a new study using advanced dating techniques shows them to be up to 8,000 years old – possibly the oldest surviving large-scale, naturalistic, three-dimensional animal reliefs in the world. “They are absolutely stunning and, bearing in mind we see them now in a heavily eroded state... the original site must have been absolutely mind blowing,” says archaeologist Maria Guagnin, lead author of the study. “There were life-sized camels and equids two or three layers on top of each other.”

The region was wetter and largely grassland in the Neolithic era, and little is known about who made the reliefs or why. Livia Gershon writes in *Smithsonian Magazine*: “Some of the camels depicted in the reliefs have bulging necklines and round bellies – typical features of the animals during mating season. This suggests that the site was tied to fertility or a specific time of year.” Whatever, the reliefs were a major effort – they were carved with chert, a stone brought from at least nine miles distant, and scaffolding would have had to have been used. Moreover, they were re-engraved when they became too eroded.

Today, they are so eroded that they are difficult to see at a casual glance, probably why they remained undiscovered for so long. *Journal of Archaeological Science* (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2021.103165>), 15 Sept; *Smithsonian Magazine/Smart News*, 16 Sept 2021.



Gadgets and ghosts

ALAN MURDIE asks whether modern ghost hunters know how to use their high-tech gear

The latest international conference of the Society for Psychical Research over 18-19 September 2021 was a packed online virtual gathering attracting some of the leading figures in psychical research and parapsychology. It covered a wide range of psychic topics, but of particular interest in respect to ghosts was the launch of new SPR guidance on the use of equipment by investigators seeking to penetrate the perennial mystery of haunted houses.

Previous technical notes issued through the SPR had appeared in 1968, 1996 and 2018. The new guide, *Using Equipment: Guidance Notes for Investigators of Apparitions, Hauntings, Poltergeists and Similar Phenomena* (2021), by Steve Parsons, is devoted specifically to the use of 21st century instrumentation, both its application and limitations. It introduces basic types of devices and measuring equipment that may be used in research and will prove especially useful to readers unfamiliar with the items covered or who may have been trained in other disciplines such as psychology. It also provides essential background reading for many amateur would-be ghost hunters who are keen to delve into this activity themselves in a scientific way.

There is no shortage of amateur ghost hunting groups in existence, whose projects and activities are being continually posted online and across social media (rather than appearing in academic journals). The televised antics of a select few are regularly served up as entertainment on TV channels worldwide. Hi-tech equipment and gadgets are frequently brandished, with readings and results obtained treated as significant. But it may justly be said that any scientific plausibility regarding proof that emerges from their endeavours is often sorely lacking, as will be obvious to anyone with a modicum of scientific knowledge or common sense.

The problem with all too many ghost hunters on both sides of the Atlantic over the last quarter of a century is being rich in imagination but deprived in terms of scientific knowledge, purpose or reasoning. Nowhere is this more apparent than with a widespread failure to appreciate that all existing technology and equipment can accomplish is to measure physical changes



LEFT: Even 1950s French ghost hunters needed decent equipment – and a thermos of hot coffee.

Too many ghost hunters are rich in imagination but deprived in terms of scientific knowledge

and patterns. All that technology can identify is corroboration of some physical anomaly in a property that *might* be linked with paranormal activity of some kind, as reported by residents, eye-witnesses and percipients. What instrumental readings do *not* provide is any direct proof for the existence of spirits, or even evidence from which the existence of spirits might be rationally inferred with anything approaching certainty.

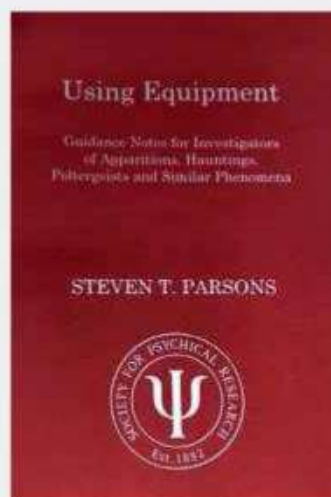
It is a lesson that the SPR has tried to get across for more than a century. Instrumentation came in during the late 19th century, when ghost hunts occurred in the séance room. Craving ghostly experiences, people flocked to sittings in the way they enthusiastically invade haunted houses today.

The danger of losing objectivity in such investigations (and jettisoning scientific

automatic agency – as by the phonograph or the sensitised photographic plate. The phonograph... might successfully be applied to the registration of raps; and the experiment is one that we hope will eventually be made.” Myers hoped that equipment could be used to confirm the objective reality of phenomena by way of instrumental traces, planning to lay the foundations for new theories and a coherent philosophy.

Parsons succinctly restates this understanding for the 21st century, making it clear at the outset that “equipment can only be used to determine the level of a physical variable or the rate at which it is changing.”

Instrumental investigation from the 1890s onwards certainly delivered results (mostly negative) for Spiritualism. The tightening of testing conditions seemingly put paid to many physical manifestations, including ectoplasm. By the mid-1930s infra-red beams were banishing the most spectacular effects from séances. Professor CD Broad, SPR President, remarked that the fact that many mediumistic phenomena could not occur in the presence of equipment “may or may not be a significant fact, but it is



certainly an unfortunate one.” (*The Mind and Its Place in Nature*, 1937.) There were exceptions – the Schneider brothers from Germany and later the Batcheldor and ‘Philip’ experiments with table-turning in the 1970s – but physical mediumship declined.

After 1945 came a generation concentrating on using portable scientific instrumentation in ghost hunting at external locations. Many experiments and vigils were held, with some successes in recording poltergeist activity. From this period two distinctive approaches to ghost hunting emerged. There was the sedate method, using mediums, a good illustration being descriptions by Diana Norman (1933-2011) of her investigations at heritage sites in the early 1960s accompanied by society clairvoyant Tom Corbett, a seer enjoying a reputation amongst the British aristocracy (a class among whom ghost beliefs lingered). Professionally, Norman was a talented and erudite writer, the wife of the film critic Barry Norman (1933-2017), who wrote a poignant tribute and memoir of her talents entitled *See You in the Morning* in 2013. However, the critical faculties she so often displayed as a journalist proved wholly in abeyance during her association with Corbett. She freely admitted: “It never occurs to me to doubt any of Tom Corbett’s pronouncements on what ghosts are doing. Usually, when they have got to know him, the ghost owners themselves accept his explanation with just an implicit faith.” (*The Stately Ghosts of England*, 1963.)

In contrast, a stricter and more objective approach was demonstrated by biologist Dr George Owen who teamed up with Fleet Street reporter Victor Sims in *Science and the Spook* (1971). They demanded evidence, capable of independent assessment, and encouraged researchers to deploy cameras and recording devices without the need to embrace Spiritualist impressions.

The mass availability of tape recorders and videos over the next decade encouraged and empowered many would-be modern investigators. “Ghost hunting is a time-consuming operation but it can be thrilling fun if you have the nerve for it,” wrote Paul Huson in *How to Test and Develop Your ESP* (1974), but many newcomers

to the field began hopelessly mixing the two approaches, following Norman and Corbett rather than Owen and Sims. They failed to grasp that the role of equipment was not to ‘detect spirits’ but only to record tangible and measurable traces for further analysis. This widespread misunderstanding of the role of equipment mushroomed into treating recordings as an automatic corroboration of



ABOVE: Ghost hunting with the aristocracy – actress Margaret Rutherford and psychic to the toffs Tom Corbett (right) appear in the 1965 film *The Stately Ghosts of England*, based on Diana Norman’s book.

the pronouncements of psychics or evidence that a ghost was present. More positively, equipment could be used to identify, determine and eliminate natural causes, or to gather physical readings that might not be expected according to existing scientific models. Very occasionally, instrumental readings might potentially provide some corroboration as to what the witnesses already reported, though actual causation remained mysterious.

While the sophistication and sensitivity of equipment has massively advanced in the last 25 years, these developments often appear to have overtaken the capacity of those using them to properly understand and deploy them. Back in 1993, Dr Alan

Gauld pointed out how “around the country there are many little ‘psychical research’ societies whose principal *raison d’être* is to have a midnight *frisson* on their occasional ‘ghost-hunts’ and fun and buns at their occasional meetings,” but that they were not adding to research efforts by neglecting scientific baselines or assuming spirits were already proven. (Presidential Address, *Proceedings of the SPR* vol.57, 1984-1993). Unfortunately, SPR guidance and caution were

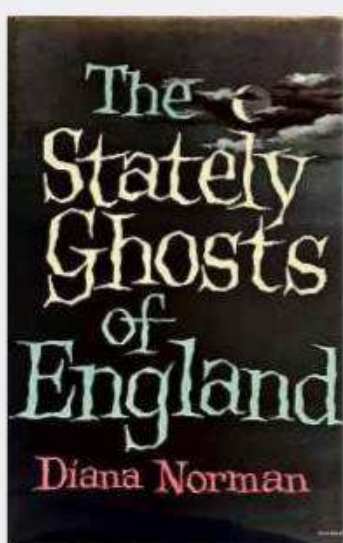
often bypassed and eclipsed by the rise of ghost hunting as a social phenomenon entering the 21st century, its growth eagerly matched by ever-expanding and sensation-hungry televisual media seeking ratings over accuracy and intelligent analysis.

Such conditions proved a breeding ground for fallacy, matching an observation of Myers that engaging in practical séances and

communicating with spirits “had encouraged the craft of impostors, trading on the expectation that certain persons would be found here and there to possess occult powers,” and also “encouraged credulity and superstition of those who should have been observers but have become devotees”. All too frequently, popular ghost hunting today rests upon assumptions of ghosts being proven to be discarnate entities, and often rather disagreeable ones at that.

Thus, in listening to some ghost hunters describe their adventures, one may readily hear mention of other dimensions, dark energies, menacing vortices and non-human entities, all lacking any proven scientific foundation and certainly not confirmed by instrumental evidence. What are styled as ghost hunts are often saturated with a heady mixture of occult, New Age or science fiction beliefs and fantasies. Contemporary ghost hunts may even incorporate Americanised notions of demons (a re-import regarding the UK, traceable back to 17th century Protestant fundamentalism, but without the corresponding virtues of discipline, probity and sobriety). Unsurprisingly, the capacity for making sound judgments by participants in investigations is shed along the way and their credibility dented, leading to powerful critiques such as *Investigating Ghosts: The Scientific Search for Spirits* (2017) by Benjamin Radford. Even more sympathetic individuals, with some grasp of scientific techniques, look askance and despairingly at what is being routinely claimed.

Addressing some of these problems is a quietly stated aim that Parsons’s guide may hopefully achieve. More widely, there is an audience of genuinely interested individuals who will gain from the SPR’s updating of publications in what is a rapidly





GHOSTWATCH

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expanding field. Underpinning this is a very basic message: properly prepared and understanding what they are doing, ghost hunters can and do make significant findings and contributions – but there is absolutely no point equipping yourself with gadgets and devices if you have no idea how to use them in any meaningful way.

So, when meeting ghost hunters deploying equipment – especially those asking the public to pay a fee to join them in investigating – how may one determine if proceedings are likely to be conducted in a scientific and rational manner?

A good starting point is recognising that before any measuring device is switched on, the user ought to have a basic grasp of the internationally used units of scientific measurement, the SI system (Système International d'Unités). Furthermore, anything beyond the most basic varieties of equipment will be a sensitive piece of instrumentation, so prior to it being deployed it should be tested and calibrated.

Deploying an EMF meter? A good question for testing the knowledge of the user is to ask: “What precisely is this used to measure?” If told it is used to find spirits, then one will be wasting one’s time and is in the realm of entertainment. EMF meters measure electromagnetic fields. Now it is possible that there may be anomalous electromagnetic fields at a ‘haunted’ location, but that this does not equate to any ghost, at least in terms of the presence of a spirit entity, rather the existence of a possible electromagnetic anomaly which might have a range of causes. More technical questions for an operator are whether single axis or tri-axis is being used in measurements. Does the operator use milligauss (mG) or MicroTesla (Ut) as the unit of assessment? If deploying thermometers, questions come thick and fast. What type is being used? And what is the baseline recording being used at the beginning? How and when were they calibrated? How frequently are they to be monitored and how will the readings be mapped?

Testing for rapping sounds or Electronic Voice Phenomena – is the recording device analogue or digital? What is its audio input level? Is an automatic sound level switched on? (The advice is against this.) What steps are being taken to exclude ordinary sounds?

Photography, the hope of many, does not escape. Most ghost hunters will bring one or more cameras and video recording devices. If one thing has been learned, it is how inconclusive photography and film techniques prove. Undoubtedly the highest form of evidence would be capturing a visual ghost or apparition on camera, yet from more than 160 years of attempts to do so the results are negligible, even non-existent, at least regarding clearly recognisable human forms.



How may one determine if proceedings are likely to be conducted in a scientific manner?

Digital cameras have both improved and worsened the situation in terms of acquiring evidence. Shutter speed, aperture and many technical aspects come into play with assessment. If anything has been learned, it is that ghosts cannot be photographed, despite the deep wishes of many. Odd and peculiar images can be gathered, but remain inconclusive, or can be questioned or demolished. A wider scrutiny of filming in haunted premises sustains this conclusion. For example, deployment of CCTV and 24-hour electronic surveillance might be expected to have recorded ghosts at the Tower of London or Hampton Court, and at many of the stately homes that once received a visitation from Tom Corbett. An example is the Police Staff College at Bramshill, accommodated in a Jacobean house under continuous electronic surveillance by a 24-hour video security system. In spite of a long history of ghostly hauntings at the site, which is linked to the ‘bride in a chest’ or ‘Mistletoe Bough’ legend – video monitoring has not recorded any apparitions. The two tentative conclusions that may be drawn are either (1) a null hypothesis – there are no ghosts, or (2) visual apparitions resemble dream imagery in that they cannot be photographed.

In setting this out, Parsons is well placed to put an objective view. A previous generation of his family were keen Spiritualists (a fact he discovered fairly recently), but more pertinently he has a grounding in practical science and engineering from the petroleum and chemical industry and a clinical knowledge from nursing work. Back in 2010-2011 he rang what I called the passing bell for the ‘orb’ phenomena, those luminous spheres and dots that turn up in digital photographs and are so often claimed as paranormal (despite repeated objections from skilled photographers). Experimental findings by

LEFT: There’s no point using an EMF meter if you don’t know what you’re measuring with it.

Parsons and others confirm orbs as reflections of tiny particles in the air, after exhaustive experiments using a Fujifilm W1 3D digital camera, where matched stereo images are taken of the same view. Steve Parsons noted that “all 630 that we obtained in the survey were readily explained using the stereo photography technique. That is 0% paranormal but 100% explainable.” They appear on pictures because the typical flash unit of a camera today is much closer to the lens than with older models. Essentially, with orbs, you see dust particles animated by air currents and Brownian motion. (See conference paper to the SPR in September 2010 and published as “Orbs! Some Definitive Evidence That They Are Not Paranormal” by Steve Parsons in *Anomaly*, the Journal of ASSAP, vol.44 Nov 2010).

No technical refutation of this has emerged – nor, in my opinion, is any to be anticipated. So, rather than messing around with orbs, ghost hunters interested in light phenomena would be better off pursuing cases of luminous anomalies or so-called ‘spook-lights’ reported across the globe and, on occasion, apparently photographed.

Undoubtedly, all of this may be as unwelcome as an infra-red camera at a pre-1945 ectoplasm séance. Asking these types of questions on ‘ghost hunting nights’ where a fee is charged to participate may prove revelatory and unpopular. However, such provisos do not necessarily disqualify all approaches using sensitives and mediums or mean we should forego them. Rather it is a question of recognising respective boundaries. Unlike some hardcore physicalists, I do not reject the importance of eyewitness testimony (again something that modern ghost hunting groups often neglect). There are also some classes of experience e.g., the sense of a presence, physical touches, bedroom invaders and ghostly smells where existing technical approaches will not easily assist, if at all.

For example, major poltergeist incidents – a chair tipping over with no one near it, showers of stones or spontaneous fires – involve physical events. There is no half-way house of misperception to help. This is where explanations from anomalous psychology dry up, but where instrumental evidence together with witness testimony can combine to present a *prima facie* case that a genuinely paranormal phenomenon is occurring. This guide, to be accompanied with a series of outreach meetings and workshops backed by the SPR in 2022, will be of great assistance to investigators in effectively engaging with such challenging situations.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

265: SIGNS OF THE TIMES

“Everything that is called true must merge away indistinguishably into something called false” – Fort, *Books*, p148

Another round of ancient-modern juxtapositions, the two halves, though somewhat differing in content and style, forming a recognisable nexus.

Perhaps the earliest, certainly the best known, mystery message is the writing on the wall in the OT, Book of Daniel, ch5.

Babylonian king Belshazzar was revelling in one of his customary feasts when he saw a hand appear and write the following message on the palace wall:

MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN

Understandably shaken by this, Belshazzar summoned his astrologers and assorted wise men to translate and explain, promising a golden chain, scarlet robes, and third place in the royal succession. All were baffled. In desperation, Belshazzar accepted the advice that he should summon Daniel, who had a great reputation for his quasi-divine wisdom, promising him the same rewards.

Having reminded Belshazzar of the fate of his father Nebuchadnezzar, previously punished for his sins with boanthropy, also dressing him down for his own shortcomings, Daniel, clearly a first-class philologist and Bletchley-quality code-cracker, immediately interpreted the words thus (King James version):

MENE: God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

TEKEL: Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

PERES: Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Scholars versed in the Middle Eastern languages here detect a linguistic salad accompanied by much punning. The story has inevitably been dismissed by many as a fabrication. Even Belshazzar’s existence has been questioned. Daniel concludes by saying he was slain the same night, replaced by another shadowy figure, Darius the Mede.

If you add up the various shekels inherent in the text, they add up to 62, the exact age of Darius. Despite his reputation for wisdom, we have to be impressed by Daniel’s lightning decipherment. Was it genuine? Can’t have been music to the ears of Belshazzar, who sportingly gave him the promised rewards. Did Daniel simply make it up to frighten the king, along with boosting the power of Jehovah?

Two addenda: the *Jewish Encyclopædia* (online) cites a mention in *Proceedings of*

the Society for Biblical Archaeology 18 (1896), p237 of a cuneiform tablet listing other such mysterious predictions by unknown hands. Herodotus knew nothing of the tale, but his account (bk1 ch191) does mention that when Cyrus diverted the Euphrates and marched up its riverbed into Babylon, he was unnoticed because “there was a great festival going on.”

Daniel’s complicated mathematics may take us to another famous inscription, a seemingly straightforward one from classical Athens. Over the entrance to Plato’s Academy there was supposedly written the injunction “Let No One Ignorant of Geometry Enter” – Would have let me out (three-time O Level Maths failer). Unfortunately, everyone seems ignorant of this curriculum

requirement until a handful of Byzantine commentators on Aristotle many centuries later. Aristotle’s silence on it is deafening, himself both an Academy pupil and teacher.

Plato certainly stressed the importance of geometry

throughout his *Republic*, and it is the subject chosen as paradigm for educational method in his *Meno*. But these may not be sufficient grounds for singling it out in this way. Also, unless everyone in Athens was presumed competent in it, why could you not learn it at Plato U along with the other disciplines required to become a ‘Philosopher King’?

The night before a crucial battle, Constantine saw in the sky a cross with a Greek message “In This Thou Shalt Conquer” (see FT275:49). It needed Christ to appear in a dream and explain it. The battle was fought and won (AD 312). In its Latin form, in hoc signo vinces, it has become a popular slogan. Fort has much to say on diverse sky-cloud visual phenomena.

One of Schulz’s *Peanuts* cartoons makes the point. Gazing at the clouds, Lucy asks Linus what he sees: Linus replies he can see British Honduras, painter-sculptor Thomas Eakins, the stoning of Stephen with Paul looking on. Lucy praises him, then asks Charlie Brown what he sees: “Well, I was going to say a ducky and a horse, but I changed my mind.”

When Trajan (AD 98-117) was campaigning in Dacia (Romania), he was brought a giant mushroom on which was written in Latin a message from tribal allies advising him to suspend his campaign. Ignoring this, the emperor fought the battle and won.

Mysterious mushrooms: are we in John Allegro country? Perhaps notable that our source, Roman historian Dio Cassius (bk68 ch8 para1), evinces no surprise, albeit his text survives only in Byzantine epitome. One may admire the skill required to carve such a Latin message on a fungus. Did the senders have no other writing materials to hand? No tree bark, as recommended by various Greek and Roman writers? Or wooden tablets, like the Vindolanda one from near Hadrian’s Wall with its scathing reference to *Brittunculi* (little Brit shits).

Trajan’s column (Scene 9) depicts a mysterious round object near a man fallen from a mule. Some take this to allude to this mushroom. Others advocate a round kitchen object of some kind; cf. Roger Ulrich’s website, also NJE Austin & NB Rankov, *Exploratio: Military & Political Intelligence in the Roman World from the Second Punic War to the Battle of Adrianople* (2002), p9.

Since Trajan ignored the message, would he immortalise it on his Column? But, what propaganda purpose would a kitchen gadget serve? Clearly, mushroom for speculation...

Fort (p145) provides transition to modern times, quoting Charles Holder’s article on the strange stone found (1909) in the Yaqui valley, Mexico: “A sensational story went from one end to the other end of the country that a stone bearing human inscriptions had descended to the earth.” Fort appends a detailed and sceptical discussion thereof, fastening upon the claim of Holder (with Major Burnham) that its symbols resembled Mayan lettering – petroglyphs have also been suggested for this object, now commonly referred to as the Esperanza Stone.

It has long been claimed that a field somewhere in the North of England contains a noticeboard reading “Please Do Not Throw Stones at This Sign”. Often debunked as an urban-rural myth, this might also be explained as a piece of English eccentricity, or simply as a prank.

At the core of Fort and FT is the question: WHAT do people believe and WHY?

Trawling the many related websites (many with alleged pictures of the sign), you find that some people ridicule the claim, others claim to have seen it – but, significantly, always in different parts of the country: how many such noticeboards can there possibly be? Many individuals have added their own examples of weird to stupid signs, ranging from one up Mount Kilimanjaro ordering “Please Do Not Urinate in This Rain Gauge” to (my favourite) a notice at Glasgow General Hospital advising “Basement Downstairs”. Time to sign off...





KARL SHUKER reports on black tigers, an abducted alligator and another loss to cryptozoology



ABOVE LEFT: Cryptozoological author Michael Newton on the Nessie trail. ABOVE RIGHT: Shots of black tigers taken in the Similipal Nature Reserve.

MICHAEL NEWTON, RIP

This year will assuredly be remembered by cryptozoology as cursed. Following my obituaries for Scott Mardis and Paul Bottriell [FT411:24], I am sad to announce that yet another major name and longstanding friend of mine in cryptozoology has passed away – Michael Newton, from incurable kidney disease, on 6 September 2021 in Nashville, Indiana, aged 69. We have greatly assisted each other in our respective researches over many years. He honoured me immensely by dedicating his superlative, award-winning *Encyclopedia of Cryptozoology* to me and also by writing the foreword to my book, *Still in Search of Prehistoric Survivors*. Michael was an exceptionally prolific author, writing numerous highly acclaimed novels, learned works on a diverse range of non-fiction subjects, and several very notable cryptozoology volumes in addition to his *Encyclopedia*. His loss is immeasurable, both to cryptozoology and to the literary world in general. The Gang of Fort offer sincerest condolences to his family and friends. <http://michaelnewton.homestead.com/bio.html>.

A DARKER SHADE OF DARK

True melanism is when an animal's background colour is abnormally dark (due to the expression of a mutant gene allele), so much so that any surface patterns or markings are hidden by it, as with the rosettes of a black leopard, for example. Despite many eyewitness reports and anecdotal accounts, however, no melanistic or black tiger has ever been scientifically confirmed. This exotic cat form thus remains a cryptid – claimed to exist by locals but not verified by science. Yet in recent years, following largely unconfirmed sightings dating

back half a century, media reports have documented several living specimens in eastern India's Similipal Nature Reserve of what they refer to as black tigers. However, photographs swiftly confirm that they are not melanistic specimens, but represent an equally intriguing but reverse phenomenon, known as pseudomelanism. This is characterised by the animals' background colour being normal but their surface markings being abnormally abundant and broad, fused together to yield an almost unbroken, solid black mass of dark pigmentation, especially dorsally and on the tigers' flanks, largely obscuring the background coloration.

Until now, the genetic basis of pseudomelanism in tigers has remained unknown. In September 2021, however, a study in the journal *PNAS (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences)* conducted by researchers from the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) in Bangalore revealed that this condition was the result of a rare mutation in one gene, Transmembrane Aminopeptidase Q (or Taqpep, for short), recessively inherited variants of which are also responsible for the markings in domestic cats and in the ornately striped king mutant form of the normally spotted cheetah. Moreover, whereas it has been estimated that up to 37% of all tigers in the Similipal Nature Reserve are pseudomelanistic, there do not appear to be any such specimens elsewhere in India. The researchers believe this to be due to a combination of a small founder population at Similipal, its isolation from other tiger populations, and inbreeding within the Similipal tiger population. Also, these tigers' darker coloration may be giving them a selective advantage when hunting in the shadowy forests of Similipal. [https://](https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/how-and-why-these-tigers-in-odisha-changed-their-stripes/article36443586.ece)

[www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/how-and-why-these-tigers-in-odisha-changed-their-stripes/article36443586.ece;](https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/how-and-why-these-tigers-in-odisha-changed-their-stripes/article36443586.ece)
<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/scientists-unravel-mystery-behind-odishas-black-tigers-7508798/>.

UNDERSEA ALLIGATOR EATEN

In a recently reported experiment to learn more about predation on the seabed in the Gulf of Mexico, marine ecologist Dr Craig McClain from the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON) and a fellow LUMCON researcher sank three alligator carcasses 2km (1.25 miles) down onto the seabed there. The first one was devoured in less than a day by giant isopod crustaceans and other scavengers as expected (though at a far quicker rate than anticipated). After leaving the second one submerged for 51 days before retrieving it, they discovered that it had been picked entirely clean, not a single scute or scale remaining. That surprised the two scientists, until they discovered that the culprit was a recently discovered species of bone-devouring worm.

However, a greater surprise was still to come, one that still remains unresolved. When they investigated the third alligator carcass, they were startled to discover that it had been carried away by something – but what? As the carcass had weighed several hundred pounds, the most likely culprit is either a giant squid or a massive shark, but as the scientists have never seen one of either of those animal types big enough to carry off such a load, they have suggested that "it's likely a new species". They plan to repeat the experiment using a whole whale carcass. <https://outsider.com/outdoors/scientists-suspect-massive-unknown-predator-bottom-sea-capable-eating-alligator>.



ANIMAL ATTACKS

Shakira mugged by Barcelona boars, Alaskan otters go on the offensive and Spanish orcas continue their reign of terror...

MUGGED BY BOARS

In Barcelona, Colombian singer Shakira was attacked by a pair of wild boars in a city park. The animals grabbed her bag and headed off into woods where they shredded it and destroyed the contents. This was just the latest incident in a continuing conflict with boar in the city where the animals have been attacking dogs, plundering cat feeders, damaging cars and holding up traffic. Across Europe, boar numbers have exploded in recent years and lockdowns have led to ever more confident packs invading cities, from which they are proving difficult to dislodge. Berlin and Rome have been particularly badly affected by boar incursions; in May a woman in a Roman supermarket carpark was surrounded by boars who ripped her bags from her and rootled through the contents, and the mayor has complained that opposition politicians are using the boar invasion to score political points against him. Meanwhile, in Berlin, a nudist made headlines after giving chase to a boar who stole his laptop bag (see **FT397:12**). Extensive culling efforts are being made but seem to be having little effect on boar numbers, not helped by boars having extremely thick hides which regular bullets bounce off; in 2013 a Barcelona police officer tried to shoot one with his service revolver but hit his partner instead. (For other recent cases of boars behaving badly, see **FT398:11** and **401:16**). *BBC News*, 7 Aug 2020, 30 Sept 2021; *Guardian* 14 May 2021.

REVENGE OF THE ORCAS II

Since July 2020, when shipping began to return after initial lockdowns, many small boats sailing off western Spain and Gibraltar have reported concerted attacks by orcas, with 53 attacks being reported from June to mid-July 2021 alone (see **FT401:17**). Martin Evans was on a yacht 50 miles (80km) west of Gibraltar in June this



ABOVE LEFT: A wild boar on the streets of Rome. ABOVE RIGHT: Pop star Shakira's handbag was pinched by boars in Barcelona.

year when a pod of a dozen or more whales, ranging from small juveniles to full-size adults, targeted the vessel. "There was constant whale activity, port and starboard side. Wherever we looked there was one coming in," he said. "I think we were hit on the rudder 100 or 200 times. It was consistent. They were around for a solid hour... We could see them breaking the surface in the distance and making a beeline straight for the rudder. They were very focused in their task." At one point he could see an orca swimming away with a chunk of his rudder in its mouth. Many of the attacks on boats have been so severe that the vessels have needed to be rescued by coastguards and towed into port, although none have yet been sunk. Dr Ruth Esteban, a marine scientist investigating the orcas' behaviour with the Atlantic Orca Working Group, says they have identified the whales involved, saying: "At the moment it is two groups that belong to two different families" and that their behaviour is evolving. "Last year it was mostly small sailing vessels, but this year they are going for larger sailing vessels and even catamarans, destroying both rudders."

It still isn't clear why the orcas are acting this way, although there has been speculation that one of the group was injured by a boat and they are taking revenge. Whale biologist Dr

Renaud de Stephanis says their behaviour is not aggressive: "When they hunt, you don't hear or see them. They are stealthy, they sneak up on their prey. I've seen them attacking sperm whales – that's aggressive, but these guys, they are playing... They can weigh 4-5 tonnes and when they play, they really play." As to why they are targeting boats, Esteban says: "We didn't know at the beginning, and we still don't know now why it is happening. And I don't know if we will ever know." Renaud concludes "They love it. And I don't know why, it just seems to be something they really like and that's it." In an attempt to reduce conflict between the orcas and boats, Spanish authorities have twice closed areas off the coast to vessels under 15m (50ft) long, but this seems to have done little to blunt the orcas' enthusiasm. *BBC News*, Nov 2020; *Guardian*, 8 Aug; *yachtingworld.com*, 2 Sept 2021.

OFFENSIVE OTTERS

In Anchorage, Alaska, it is otters that are going on the offensive. During 2021 there have been frequent attacks on people and pets by river otters in several popular outdoor areas near rivers, creeks and lakes along the city's greenbelt, with a nine-year-old boy being taken to hospital for rabies shots after being bitten several times by otters near a duckpond. The same

week a woman was bitten while rescuing her dog from a pack of aggressive otters, and another dog was also bitten. River otters are not usually aggressive, and Alaska's Fish and Game department is investigating whether the attacks involve the same group, as they can range over large areas. If so, they aim to track down the offending animals and relocate them to an area where they won't come into contact with humans and their pets. *cbsnews.com*, 28 Sept 2021.

OPIATED COYOTES

After three coyote attacks in four days, including a man being bitten on the leg outside a pitch and putt golf course, Vancouver residents were warned to avoid the city's Stanley Park. These were just the most recent in a spate of attacks on people by coyotes there, which had persisted even after several offending animals were culled by officials. University of Calgary coyote expert Shelley Alexander said she suspected a number of factors accounted for their behaviour. She thought they had lost their fear of people after being fed by humans and had been displaced from their usual territory by homeless encampments, but she added that "the behaviour of some of these individuals suggest they've ingested toxins or drugs, possibly opioids." *bc.ctvnews.ca*, 17 Aug 2021.

THE C NSPIRASPHERE

From the JFK assassination to 9/11, we have tales of would-be whistleblowers offering advance warnings of disaster. **NOEL ROONEY** wonders what we should make of such claims.

EARLY WARNINGS

I was trawling through some articles about the release of documents and files relating to the JFK assassination recently, and came across a thread of the story that was completely new to me. The eerie thing about this story is how it links the conceptual framework of the JFK conspiracy theory to the main lines of the 9/11 conspiracy theories; that intelligence chatter revealed a plot, but intelligence agencies covered up the evidence for their own nefarious reasons.

The 9/11 intelligence failures (to use the most anodyne term for what happened) are relatively well-known; even some of the official narratives concede that advance warnings constituted evidence that was ignored at great cost. Opinions, and therefore narratives, diverge when it comes to the motivation for ignoring what appears to be prima facie advance evidence of the attacks. For the adherents of the official version, it's a sad indictment of the silo mentality infecting US three-letter agencies prior to 9/11; a mentality that was, presumably, cured by the creation of a meta-agency overseeing all aspects of homeland security. For the truthers, it's further evidence that the attacks were, at the very least, allowed to happen, if not engineered by the US security apparatus.

In 1963, it appears that two independent sources reported intelligence chatter indicating a plot to assassinate John Kennedy in Dallas. Private Eugene Dinkin (pictured above) was a cryptographic code operator stationed in France. In early November 1963 he went AWOL and, apparently using fake documents, turned up in Geneva. Two days later, he appeared in the press room of the United Nations and announced that "they" were



*Dinkin said
"something
would happen
in Dallas"*

plotting to kill the President and that "something would happen in Dallas". Prior to his disappearance and emergence in Geneva, he apparently sent a letter to Robert Kennedy outlining his suspicions; I have found no record of RFK receiving the letter, or reacting to it.

A week later, he was arrested by the US military (it would be interesting to know what he did in the meantime). He was taken to a psychiatric hospital and from there transferred to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center where he underwent a barrage of tests. He was eventually released, and died in California (of natural causes) in 2012. Friends claimed he had told them, before his incarceration and 'treatment', that JFK would be killed in Dallas, and the murder would be blamed on "a Communist or a Negro".

David Christensen was a sergeant in the USAF, stationed in Scotland, at an intelligence facility (known at

the time as a listening post) in Kirknewton. (Kirknewton has its own conspiratorial story; there are rumours that intelligence operations continued at the site for many years after its official closure.) His job was to monitor and intercept voice and Morse code communications from military sources – Soviet sources presumably – but it appears that he accidentally came across communications hinting at a military plot to kill JFK.

Some years later, in a letter to a friend sent from a military hospital in Wyoming, Christensen claimed that he had tried to get his superiors to send his warning to the NSA, but had been thwarted. The letter ends with a quirky Morse reference that looks meaningless, but may have been a coded message from Christensen to his old friend.

Just like Dinkin, Christensen later spent time in a psychiatric institution. It was nearly 14 years before he wrote about his experiences in October 1963, but when he did, he said he was ready to name names (the aforementioned letter contains cryptic references to a person who was "number 4 in a certain branch of organised crime"). I could find no later references to him in relation to the JFK plot, although it appears that a colleague of his was interviewed by staffers on the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1978; why they didn't interview Christensen himself is unclear. David Christensen died in 2008 and, as far as I can ascertain, made no further statements, at least not in public, on his discovery.

The uncanny echoes here between the two biggest conspiracies of them all is intriguing. If nothing else, they point to an element of high strangeness in the history of catastrophic events; in the

time leading up to the event, whispers of it escape into the æther, to be picked up by individuals who try to warn the appropriate authorities, but are rebuffed. This, it seems to me, is connected in some deeply odd way to the equally weird phenomenon that many such events are preceded by official exercises gaming exactly the scenario that unfolds – think 'Event 201' (the 'high-level pandemic exercise' from October 2019) for a contemporary example.

What are we to make of the claims put forward by Dinkin and Christensen? Did Dinkin really intuit not just the idea of assassination, but clues as to time and place, by reading back issues of *Stars and Stripes*, as many chroniclers suggest? And was Christensen picking up clues from US military communications, or from the Soviets (the people he was supposed to be tracking)? It would be easy to put all this down to a mystical quality of premonition secreted by global trauma, but these people, like FBI whistleblower Sibel Edmonds 40 years later, seem to have found concrete evidence, in advance, of events that transpired out of the blue according to the official narrative.

Perhaps time runs on a different protocol in the Conspirasphere. Perhaps a few individuals (I would hesitate to call them privileged) are harbingers of great events. And perhaps, just perhaps, real conspiracies betray themselves in tiny leaked details that, like Morse code, can only be understood by a few.

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MEDICAL BAG

This month's casebook of curiosa presents two successful separations of conjoined twins, a Lithuanian metal muncher and a chronic snoozer



LEFT: The twin girls following the 12-hour operation. BELOW LEFT: They had previously been joined at the head.

TWINS SEPARATED

Surgeons at the Soroka Medical Centre in Beersheba, Israel, have separated one-year-old conjoined twins who were connected by the back of the head. The twin girls, who have not been named, were separated in a 12-hour operation that involved dozens of experts from Israel and elsewhere. Such a separation has only been performed on 20 occasions and this was the first time it had been done in Israel. To carry out the operation, the surgeons created a 3D virtual reality model of the girls to map out every move, and implanted inflatable silicone bags beneath the girls' scalps. These were gradually expanded to stretch the skin so that there was enough available to cover their heads after their skulls had been reconstructed. The operation was a complete success, with both girls breathing and eating on their own. The twins are expected to be able to lead completely normal lives as individuals.

In October, Jordan's chief surgeon announced that the Amman Specialised Hospital had successfully performed



the country's first operation to separate conjoined twins – a pair of seven-month-old boys from Yemen. Doctor Fawzi al-Hammouri said it was “a rare and delicate” procedure requiring 25 surgeons and advisors. Although the eight-hour operation was carried out in July, the announcement of its success was delayed because the babies still required “intensive care, artificial respiration and intravenous feeding for a long time... We wanted to wait until we were sure 100 per cent that things went smoothly,” said Doctor al-Hammouri. He described the twin boys, Ahmed and Mohammed, as being in “excellent health” and having every chance of going on to

lead healthy lives. “The danger has disappeared,” he said. *BBC News*, 6 Sept; *france24.com*, 3 Oct 2021.

COME AGAIN

For those old enough to remember Peter Cook and Dudley Moore's ribald, gross and extremely funny *Derek and Clive* albums from the 1970s, a research article published recently by US scientists provides a startling example of ostension in relation to one of their sketches. The article, with the title *A Curious Case of Rectal Ejaculation*, describes the case as follows: “A 33-year-old male with a history of illicit drug use presented with five days of testicular pain. He also

noted a substantial amount of urine and sperm passage from his rectum in addition to pneumaturia and fecaluria (gas and faeces in the urine) for the past two years.” Medical investigation revealed that the understandably anonymous man was suffering from a long-standing urinary tract infection and a CT scan showed there was a swelling in his left testicular tube and a gas-filled structure in his prostate that was connected to his rectum. According to the doctors, this situation was probably the result of the man's hospitalisation two years previously when he spent three weeks in a coma as a result of an overdose of cocaine and the hallucinogen phencyclidine and had to be catheterised. This procedure seems to have caused “significant trauma”, resulting in the fistula that connected his prostate and rectum. It's existence only became apparent after his discharge from hospital, but he did not report it to doctors until he began to suffer the testicular pain. Surgery to close the fistula and deal with the other damage resolved the problem, and amazingly the individual recovered fully, with, as the paper puts it “only mildly reduced antegrade ejaculatory volume over several months”.; *cureus.com*, 20 Aug; *<i>*, 23 Sept 2021.

REWILDING THE GUT

In recent years, faecal transplants, the replacement of a person's gut bacteria (gut microbiome) with those of someone else by means of injecting treated faeces into the bowel, have become an accepted treatment for a limited number of medical conditions. At the same time, the movement to rewild our environment by reintroducing locally extinct



species to landscapes where they once roamed has gained pace. Now, some researchers are attempting to combine the two to “rewild their gut” by collecting faecal samples from hunter gatherer peoples and transplanting them to the guts of Westerners. They are doing this in the belief that autoimmune diseases, obesity, and other afflictions of the developed world are caused by an unhealthy modern gut microbiome. Their solution is to replace it with the microbiome of hunter gatherers, which they view as more like that of our palaeolithic ancestors, and so healthier.

However, many microbiome researchers are sceptical, pointing out that people were not necessarily healthier in the palaeolithic period and that there is no evidence that contemporary hunter gatherers’ microbiome is the same as that of palaeolithic peoples. They also question how useful a hunter gatherer’s gut bacteria would be to someone living a Western lifestyle, and indeed, whether they would even last long before something like the original gut bacteria population reasserted itself. Dr Rachel Carmody of Harvard University says: “Trying to manipulate the microbiome to improve human health is premature.” There are also ethical concerns, with Dr Keolu Fox of the University of California, San Diego, suggesting that rewilding the gut with samples from hunter gatherer communities is “predatory and imperialistic”. *New York Times International Edition*, 21 Jul 2021.

SCREW LOOSE

Surgeons at Klaipeda University Hospital in Lithuania removed a kilogram of nails, screws, nuts and knives from the stomach of a man admitted with severe abdominal pain. Some of the items removed were up to 10cm (4in) long. The man had apparently started swallowing metal objects over the previous month after giving up alcohol. “We’ve never seen anything like it,” said Algirdas Slepavicius,



TOP: Surgeons removed a kilogram of nails and other metal objects from a man’s stomach. **ABOVE:** Pukharam Devi, who spends most of his life asleep.

head surgeon at Klaipeda Hospital, while his colleague Sarunas Dailidenas called it a “unique case”. *FT* readers are likely to differ, as we have covered numerous cases of pica, as the compulsive swallowing of non-food items is called, over the years (see, for example, **FT385:22-23**). *BBC News*, *theguardian.com*, 2 Oct 2021.

OLFACTORY MYSTERY

A woman diagnosed with congenital anosmia – an inherited inability to smell – at age 13 unexpectedly began to smell things when she was 24. A brain scan had revealed that she lacked the parts of the brain that process odour information from the nose, the olfactory bulbs, so this ought not to have been possible. Over a period of several weeks, though, she began to smell things like lavender, garlic and manure and found the sensation strange and unpleasant; on one occasion, it was so overwhelming that it caused her to faint. Researchers at the University of Dresden investigated, presenting the

woman with 32 smells to determine which she could sense, and found she could detect about half of them, including orange, mint, smoke, turpentine, ginger and lilac, but not coconut, banana, leather, liquorice or cocoa. They then got her to sniff rotten egg smells and rose perfume while they monitored her brain activity and confirmed that her brain really was responding to the odours; but a new scan showed she still completely lacked olfactory bulbs, leaving medics puzzled. A 2019 study from Israel’s Weizmann Institute had found five women who could also smell without olfactory bulbs, which suggests the brain can find alternative ways to process smell, but they were unable to explain how. Even though none of these had suddenly developed the ability as adults, researchers speculate that this is also the case with the Dresden patient, but that her ability to sense smells had been hormonally suppressed until she was adult. She is now undergoing odour exposure therapy to help her

adjust to her new sense and has begun to enjoy smells like curry by associating them with pleasant activities like eating. *New Scientist*, 17 Sept 2021.

NO TUMOUR

Kim Slater, 30, from Bristol has all the symptoms of a brain tumour but does not actually have the tumour. She gets headaches and vision distortion, is often so dizzy and nauseous she cannot get out of bed, and is slowly going blind. The symptoms are caused by idiopathic intracranial hypertension (IIH), a disease that results in increased pressure in the cerebrospinal fluid around the brain and causes it to react as if the pressure was being caused by a solid tumour. When the pain was at its worst, Kim said it “was exhausting and I often got confused, couldn’t speak properly and would forget things because of brain fog.” There is no known cure for IIH, which affects one in 100,000 people and also increases the risk of strokes, aneurysms and heart problems, but it can be alleviated by having a shunt installed to channel excess fluid from the brain to the stomach. *Metro*, 8 Sept 2021.

DOZY DEVI

Pukharam Devi, from Bhadwa in Rajasthan, India, sleeps for three weeks out of every four due to axis hypersomnia, a chronic neurological condition. Devi, 42, first experienced symptoms 23 years ago, when he used to sleep for five or six days before waking up, but over time, his life has been gradually taken over by sleep. He has two children, but has slept through most of their lives. Twice a day, he is shaken violently to wake him enough to eat, but he does so with his eyes closed. His family bathe him in bed and he does not get up to visit the toilet. Although he sleeps almost constantly, he never feels rested. “I feel achy and fatigued and I have headaches,” he says. Lichmi, his wife, says that “even on days when he is awake, he is very lethargic, and his eyes are half-closed.” *Times*, 22 Jul 2021.

NECROLOG

This month, a champion of freethought and professional Grinch goes to his perfect rest, and Jim Morrison's Lizard Queen breaks on through to the other side



ABOVE LEFT: Freethinker Tom Flynn. ABOVE RIGHT: Patricia Kennealy-Morrison.

TOM FLYNN

A long-standing advocate for the increasingly dated strand of secular humanism exemplified by publications like the *Skeptical Enquirer* and *Free Inquiry* magazine, of which he was editor, Tom Flynn has died suddenly aged 66, with the cause of death not announced. Born to a Catholic family, he studied philosophy and theology at the Jesuit Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, but subsequently, while working as a corporate filmmaker and advertising executive, successively renounced first his Catholicism, then his Christianity and finally his belief in any kind of god. He eventually decided he was an atheist in 1980. After a period of voluntary work for the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH) he joined the staff, becoming editor of *Free Inquiry* and eventually Director of the Council for Secular Humanism, as CODESH had renamed itself.

In 1984, Flynn stopped celebrating Christmas as he felt it was no longer “the birthday of anyone I know” and went on to write *The Trouble with Christmas*, examining the holi-

day's history from an atheist perspective. In this he argued that helping children reject Santa Claus prepared them for rejecting religious dogma when older. He would occasionally dress up as the curmudgeonly character “Anti-Claus”, wearing a black Santa hat with “Humbug” written round the edge to promote his ideas, and would often come into the office on Christmas Day, on the basis that it was “just another day”. He also wrote several science fiction novels embodying secular humanist themes and satirising religious belief and edited *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*. This compendious reference work on atheism and related philosophies gave him an opportunity to use his impressive knowledge of the history of freethought which had previously led him to set up a museum in the birthplace of influential freethinker Robert Green Ingersoll that opened in 1993.

Flynn was a tireless promoter of freethought and felt that the movement should learn from the approach used by LGBTQ+ activists in progressing their cause, particularly by publicising their numbers and

encouraging secular humanists to “out” themselves. He was, however, not enthusiastic about the recognition of LGBTQ+ marriage, as he felt marriage was an essentially religious institution and that this impeded progress towards replacing marriage with completely secular civil unions for everyone. He was, though, outspoken about the dangers of climate change, saw overpopulation as an existential threat to human welfare and was a supporter of voluntary euthanasia.

Flynn was lionised to the point of hagiography by his colleagues on his passing. Robyn E Blumner, president and CEO of the Center for Inquiry, said: “Tom didn't believe in magic, but he was magical. How else to describe this unlikely combination of brilliance, charm, vision, and roll-up-your-sleeves accomplishment?”, while freethought activist Edward Tabash described Flynn's death as “a tragedy of epic proportions for everyone who cares about the equality of atheists anywhere in the world.” Although secular humanists do not believe in an afterlife, his official Center for Inquiry obituary said Flynn “joins Ingersoll in what the Great Agnostic called ‘the perfect rest’, no longer as a mere admirer but as an equal”.

Tom Flynn, secular humanist and Grinch, born Erie, Pennsylvania, 18 Aug 1955; died Buffalo, New York, 23 Aug 2021.

PATRICIA KENNEALY-MORRISON

Born Patricia Kennely, music journalist Patricia Kennealy-Morrison gained her biggest fame as the one-time partner of rock star Jim Morrison, an experience she wrote about in a 1992 memoir, *Strange Days: My Life With and Without Jim Morrison*. Though mainly celebrated among fans of Morrison and his group The Doors, Kennealy-Morrison was also

one of the first famous Americans to practise and publicly endorse Wicca.

Somewhat ironically, she became educated in Celtic paganism while enrolled as a journalism student at St Bonaventure University, a Franciscan school in Allegany, New York. She noted the school had “an amazing library on the subject”. Transferring to Binghamton's Harpur College, she supported herself by working as a go-go dancer, usually wearing a black leather outfit. As she described her look: “I went Dark Side... Scorning the white boots and pastel-microdress go-go girl template.”

Quickly becoming an editor at *Jazz & Pop* magazine, she used her status to make known her feelings concerning the use of religion in popular music. “Black magic,” she wrote, was being used as “an interesting new wrinkle for the PR crowd”, singling out the group Coven in particular.

The young Kennely became one of the few female writers in the male-dominated field of rock journalism. Her gig at *Jazz & Pop* led to her meeting Morrison. In 1970, the two were wed in a “handfasting” ceremony involving the exchange of blood droplets. The ceremony, though, was never legally registered. In 1993 she told a reporter that handfasting “is not a legal marriage and I would hasten to say that I have never claimed to be Jim's legal wife, but it was a very valid and very binding religious ritual.” Some of the late singer's associates sought to discredit Kennealy-Morrison, saying the ritual was merely performed “for amusement” and upholding Pamela Courson as Morrison's true partner.

In addition to being a consultant on the 1991 movie *The Doors*, Kennealy-Morrison also appeared in the film in a recreation of her wedding to Morrison, playing the Wiccan



priestess who presides over the ceremony, which must have been a surreal experience for her. But she took issue with the finished film, calling it a misrepresentation of Morrison and her relationship with him. Having watched the movie at a London screening, she later told the *Daily Mail* she “would have killed” director Oliver Stone if he’d been present. “If Oliver had been at that screening, we never would have had to worry about his movie JFK,” she said. Stone said: “She was very upset and threatened to kill me or put a curse on me, for the rest of my life. Maybe she has. Because sometime you never know with these witches.”

Celebrating Samhain in 2010, she told the *Daily News* that familiar spirits often showed up for such ceremonies, partaking of the pork and apples she set out for them: “I will talk to my beloved dead, including my father and grandmother. It will be a joyful and deeply holy occasion. Jim usually shows up.”

In the 1980s, she wrote a series of Celtic-inspired fantasy novels called “The Keltiad”. One of her three Facebook pages summarised her as: “Author, ex-rock critic, Dame Templar, Celtic witch, ex-go-go dancer, Lizard Queen.” The last was a reference to Morrison, who went by the poetic sobriquet of “Lizard King”. In later years, she founded her own publishing group, Lizard Queen Press, writing and publishing murder mysteries with rock music themes.

In addition to being a Celtic Pagan High Priestess, Kennealy-Morrison was a Dame of the Ordo Supremus Militaris Templi Hierosolymitani, a Mensa member, and a Clio winner for advertising copy. She died of heart disease, 50 years and 18 days after her famous former partner.

Patricia Kennely aka Patricia Kennealy-Morrison, author and witch, born Brooklyn, New York, 4 Mar 1946; died New York, 23 July 2021, aged 75.

Brett Taylor



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

CONTEMPORARY FAIRIES #1

I hope very much, in the coming months, to publish the second part of the Fairy Census. The first 500 fairy encounters covered 2014-2017 (see FT362:30-37). The second load will cover 2018-2021. If you have any fairy experiences, please send them in.

However, in steeling myself for the necessary hours dealing with Excel spreadsheets and the bizarre, I have been looking again at the first round. What are contemporary fairies like? I have, for now, focused on the British, Irish and Manx results. On the basis of Fairy Census 1, modern fairies break down into three similarly sized categories: SWFs, Dwomes and O&Ss (‘Odds and Sods’, more on them another day). The SWFs are small-winged fairies.

These are benign and beautiful and are usually feminine; and they are bird- or often butterfly-sized. They are curious about human beings and seek them out. The second category are the Dwomes (dwarf-gnomes): if anyone has a better name I’m all ears. Dwomes stand anything from six inches to five feet tall. They are rough in appearance (clothes and body) and they tend to be male. They look as if they tumbled out of a Brian Froud book. They shun human company: they also have a temper in a way that the SWFs do not. There is surprisingly little bleed between the first two categories: in other words, there

are not many larger winged fairies; nor are there many wingless small male fairies.

The big problem for a folklorist, fairyist or fortean is to explain how we got from the traditional fairy to these three macro categories. The traditional fairy, whom we meet in Tudor sources, Georgian sources and even among the Edwardians, was an elegant,

short (but not tiny), wingless fellow with mixed feelings about human neighbours and a tendency to vindictiveness. It is almost as if the traditional fairy became two different species – Eloi and Morlocks, in science fiction terms. The elegant and generous side of fairy evolved into wee females and sprouted wings (the SWFs). The Dwomes, instead, inherited the old physical form and some of the less attractive elements of the traditional fairy’s character; but they also dropped a couple of notches on the supernatural

social scale. Most importantly, they started getting their clothes from rubbish dumps rather than from Harrods. How do we explain this divergence? Are fairies – say it quietly – no more than a social construct? Are SWFs and Dwomes, as one scientist friend suggested to me, actually the male and the female of the same species!? Or are we just seeing the dæmonic supernatural in its latest attempt to confound us sorry humans – particularly survey takers?

Simon presents *Boggart and Banshee: A Supernatural Podcast* with Chris Woodyard

THE TRADITIONAL
FAIRY WAS AN
ELEGANT, SHORT,
WINGLESS
FELLOW WITH
MIXED FEELINGS
ABOUT HUMANS



Invasion Earth

NIGEL WATSON surveys the latest sightings and ufological news from around the world

DOOMED

Now that UAPs are serious business, especially for those willing to exploit the gullibility of the public, the threat of alien invasion has been highlighted. It's bad enough that UAPs might be sophisticated drones or other forms of aircraft built by an enemy nation, but if they are of extraterrestrial origin we are well and truly screwed.

This takes us back to memories of the Golden Age of Hollywood flying saucer invasion movies in the 1950s, which featured national monuments being zapped and people killed, abducted, implanted or taken over by alien entities to do their bidding. Somehow, we managed to survive that assault on our senses.

Nick Pope, an ex-MoD chap as we all know, pours fuel on today's fears with this insight:

"To the best of my knowledge, there's no alien invasion war plan – and given the job that I did for the MoD, if such a plan existed, I would have written it, or at least inherited one from my predecessors. How would we be able to find out what the aliens wanted? Would we be able to communicate with them? How could we acquire extraterrestrial technology – and stop Russia or China acquiring it first?"

The same mantra is repeated by SETI researcher Seth Shostak, who says that this lack of a contingency plan is due to the fact that governments and the UN have not taken this subject seriously. Another SETI astronomer, John Gertz, agrees that there should be globally enforced laws and international treaties as contact with ET would be "the reckless endangerment of all mankind".

Seth admits an alien landing would cause chaos – and even if we *did* have contingency plans, there is not that much we could do against a superior alien civilisation. It is bad enough that our radio and TV broadcasting signals have streamed into space for at least 90 years, but it seems downright foolish that there have been deliberate attempts to send signals to alien civilisations. As Stephen Hawking famously put it: "If aliens visit us, the outcome would be much as when Columbus landed in America, which didn't

turn out well for the Native Americans." www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/ufo-report-aliens-seti/2021/06/09/1402f6a8-c899-11eb-81b1-34796c7393af_story.html; www.ibtimes.co.in/alien-invasion-government-insiders-reveal-they-are-not-prepared-enough-potential-first-contact-841110?

RELATIVELY ROSWELL

If there *is* an ongoing alien invasion, it must have started in our modern-era with Kenneth Arnold's flying saucers and Roswell. But fear not – the ET craft are not very well adapted to flying in our atmosphere. Since Roswell (or the lesser known Trinity crash of 1945) there have been numerous stories of saucer crashes causing the death of their own crew, making them as dangerous to fly as a kite in a thunderstorm. Would they really be much of a threat? And why would highly advanced aliens want to invade us, anyway? Surely, they could easily use far more sophisticated techniques to communicate with us and purloin whatever it is they want? As it is, they

blunder cluelessly around in our skies like something out of a Tex Avery cartoon.

Anyways, just when you think nothing more can be said about Roswell, up pops an article posted by Anthony Brasilia. Its title says it all: "Einstein's Secret Trip to View Roswell UFO Revealed in Taped Confession". The claims were made by Einstein's former assistant, Shirley Wright, who in 1993 recorded an interview with MUFON representative Sheila Jackson. The interview was noted by ufologist Leonard Springfield in one of his "UFO Crash Retrieval" status reports and to maintain Wright's anonymity, she was given the pseudonym "Edith Simpson".

Anthony tracked down Sheila Jackson, and she was able to find her old notes and one of the recordings. According to this information, Wright said she and Einstein were taken to a crisis conference at a Southwestern army air base in the summer of 1947. Led inside a heavily guarded hangar, they viewed a craft that "was disc-shaped, sort of concave", damaged on one side and took up nearly a quarter of the large building.

Wright's reaction to the craft was of "wonderment, half curiosity and maybe half

fear," she said, while Einstein was more sanguine about it, saying "something to the effect that he was not surprised that they come to Earth and that it gave him hope that we could learn more about the Universe. Contact, he said, should be a benefit for both of our worlds."

That would have been astounding enough, yet Wright goes on to say that the hanger held five humanoid, grey creatures. They had big heads, large dark eyes and were dressed in tight-fitting suits. 50 miles away, she and Einstein visited another building where they saw another similar creature that had a grotesquely bloated torso and seemed to be in pain.

Afterwards, Wright was told not to speak about the event. Anthony Brasilia made efforts to locate a paper trail or confirm Einstein was in the Roswell area at that time, but did not find anything conclusive. Other than the rediscovery of the tape recording, the story has done the rounds before; and there is even a new book out with the eye-catching title *When Einstein Went to Roswell* by Peter Strassberg, MD.

On Facebook, someone noted that this "is a 100% phoney claim" on the grounds that Einstein never had an American student aiding him and there were no female American physics students or undergraduates in the whole of the USA during his tenure at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Studies. www.ufoexplorations.com/

ROSWELL RAY GUN

We should not get too complacent about the military might of UFOs. My favourite Roswell story is by someone called "the Wanderling", who claims his uncle found a science-fiction type ray-gun device at Roswell and buried it near the debris field for safe keeping. It is a long rambling tale that echoes the many other Roswell stories that stretch the distinction between fiction and fact to its very limits. http://the-wanderling.com/roswell_raygun.html





Rise and shine with Shaun and Jenny

JENNY RANGLES finds that not much has changed in 30 years of morning television's UFO coverage

Over the years I have done many TV interviews about UFOs. One show that I recall fondly is the two-hour plus live magazine *This Morning*, on air now for 33 years. The five-days-a-week series has won multiple awards and its presenters are household names. Like most shows of this type, it has an item on UFOs now and then – there was one in September, when musician and long-term UFO enthusiast Shaun Ryder (right) was invited on to chat and take phone calls from viewers.

This was of interest to me because I did the first such feature on *This Morning* on 30 March 1989, just a few months after the show started. A studio had been created on the dockside in Liverpool, with a floating pontoon as part of the set, Granada's husband and wife team of Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan were presenting, and I was ferried by car from Stockport to Albert Dock just after dawn.

I could not help but compare my first episode of *This Morning* (I did others later) with the one involving Shaun Ryder, so I thought I'd engage in some musing about how ufologists interact with the public, and the nature of 'public' UFOs.

How much has changed and how much stayed the same across a third of a century? Not much, in how the item is presented. Guest explains why they believe in UFOs; viewers call in with their stories; guest analyses them. After all, this is the essence of UFO investigation – though as I've pointed out in interviews, you cannot analyse a case fully in just five minutes over the phone. Yet live TV requires you to try. Was it really a UFO, or just a balloon? Probably not, or maybe, isn't the most satisfying answer, but it's often the only honest one we can give.

Of course, you may be asking why is Shaun Ryder now a UFO expert? In his 'day job' Shaun began as front man of Manchester band Happy Mondays, part of the Factory Records label in the Eighties and Nineties and the focus of the city's lively music scene. By chance, one of the *Granada Reports* TV presenters alongside Richard and Judy was Tony Wilson, who ran the Hacienda Club and founded Factory. I knew Tony at Granada and did a couple of late-night art shows he presented for the network from the iconic Granada building (where our local UFO group held meetings; it's since been flattened and ITV moved down river to a spanking new Salford Quays complex).

So why was Shaun the go-to UFO expert in 2021? The Twittersphere found the idea hysterical, but his interest is very real and not recent. It goes back to something that happened when he was 15 and living in Salford.

Back then, I lived in the area too (I was in Irlam, and Shaun in Irlams o' th' Height). It was mid-1978, around 7am; it was just getting light and Shaun was at the bus stop heading into town where he worked as a messenger boy. A local schoolboy caught the same bus daily; they knew each other by sight and both witnessed what happened. (That by now 50-something has never spoken of what he saw; if you are reading this, then please do!) Shaun says an object appeared and zig-zagged across the sky. It had lots of lights and Shaun's mind considered the possibility of an alien invasion. "I had never seen anything like it," he says. He did not go public as he was just a kid. It moved so fast that he knew right away: "It wasn't ours."

The media 'solved' one UFO case around that time as a Rugby stadium on the blink – an odd explanation (though Shaun calls it something else). Our UFO group was pragmatic, as lots of people saw that incident at the same time, and, contrary to intuition, UFO researchers regard mass sightings like this as almost always caused by an Identified Flying Object. Close encounter UFO experiences tend to be focused as to people and place (if UFOs were something real and extraordinary and yet so overt that they showed themselves to cities full of people, then the debate would long have been over).

This event was just the start for Shaun. Other things happened later, although he understands – given his freely admitted time spent around the recreational drugs and music scene – that some people might be sceptical. His teenage experience, though, needed no such caveat – and, there was another witness.

On *This Morning* the viewer calls to Shaun had barely changed since that day 32 years ago when I sat in the chair. He dealt with a couple of callers in his inimitable way, but nothing dramatic emerged. A woman who had been at Stonehenge had a UFO turn up on a photo of the base of the stones. It was clear to me in seconds, from long

experience of similar 'UFOs', that this was a lens flare; a reminder that not a lot has changed across the years in terms of UFO reporting or the hard task of on-the-spot analysis of something that might have changed a caller's whole outlook on life. However, digging into that period in 1978 brought forth an unsolved case I had long forgotten from around the same time as Shaun's.

It was 21 July 1978 in a house between Irlam (where I lived) and the other Irlam (where Shaun caught his bus) and right beside Salford Quays (now host to the new ITV studios). There were two witnesses, who by chance had seen me being interviewed on Granada TV (possibly by Tony Wilson). They had contacted 'UFO expert' Patrick Moore, who told them they'd seen a meteorite. That is obviously absurd, but

he talked them out of any thought of it being a UFO until they saw me on TV, solving a case but admitting that some sightings remained puzzling. One midsummer evening this recently retired couple were admiring the lovely sky when a strange object appeared. It resembled a child's drawing of the Sun – a dark, flat disc in the centre, with rays shooting out all around

that were at least 10 times the diameter of the central object. They estimated there were 30 or 40 of these 'antennæ' and they observed the object for about 90 seconds (the husband had time to fetch binoculars, so this was not an overestimate). The object moved slowly and silently in an arc of 45 degrees across the sky, heading southwest. But there was no change in perspective as it moved – this was particularly noticeable to the wife, a gifted artist who immediately saw the anomaly.

This UFO disappeared in an odd way too. The rays 'extinguished', as if made up of a slew of lights going out one after the other in sequence as the object moved away. Remarkably, despite the nature of this event above an urban area on a lovely evening, nobody else saw this event. Half of the city should have. So why was it just this couple?

As I said earlier, sometimes the more interesting cases appear to be more in the nature of a personal display than an event that anyone in the right place at the right time can witness. UFO encounters are strange. Which is why we love them I guess.



FLIGHT INTO INFAMY

On the 50th anniversary of America's only unsolved air hijacking, **BRIAN J ROBB** examines the enduring mystery and legacy of the DB Cooper case and asks if it can ever be solved...

In the annals of crime, there is an endless fascination with the unsolved, and especially with the unidentified perpetrator. Jack the Ripper and his crimes live on today precisely because no one knows who he was. Similarly, there are the enduring conspiracy theories of the 20th century: Who killed JFK? Who Killed Marilyn Monroe? The fact that no one was ever brought to justice is where enduring contemporary fascination with these events lies. The same is true of American skyjacker DB Cooper, whose identity remains a mystery after five decades. Villain to some, folk hero to others, Cooper carried out, and seemingly got away with, an audacious heist, the kind of thing movies are made about (and several have been).

The basic facts of the case are well-established (see **FT139:18, 347:20-21**). On the afternoon of 24 November 1971, a man now widely known as "DB Cooper" hijacked a Boeing 727 aircraft as it flew between Portland and Seattle. The plane landed at Seattle-Tacoma airport where the passengers were evacuated and \$200,000 in cash (equivalent to \$1.3 million today) demanded by the hijacker was delivered. He also requested and was given four parachutes. The plane took flight once more and, somewhere over southwestern Washington State, Cooper leapt from the aircraft never to be seen again.

The mystery surrounding this event has resisted any solution for half a century. It remains the only unsolved case of commercial air piracy in the United States, and the 60-volume FBI file, code-named "NorJak", remains open to new evidence. The true identity of Cooper remains a mystery, as does his fate: did he jump from the plane, survive and live off his windfall for the rest of his days? Or did he die in making his daring escape? If so, where are his remains and the money? Over the past 50 years, various



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

ABOVE: One of the six sets of sketches of "Dan Cooper" or "DB Cooper" put out by the FBI in their attempts to find a lead in the case. **OPPOSITE:** The FBI map showing the Boeing's flightpath and Cooper's 'drop zone'.

THE IDENTITY OF COOPER REMAINS A MYSTERY, AS DOES HIS FATE

solutions have been put forward to explain exactly what happened aboard the flight and numerous individuals have been proposed as (or have claimed to be) DB Cooper.

The case has provoked endless speculation, a torrent of articles and books, and several films and television shows. It fascinates because it appears to have been a carefully planned operation that was successfully carried out, harmed no one, and saw a major

corporation brought down a peg or two. The mysterious DB Cooper became a folk hero, a modern Robin Hood. While he didn't redistribute the money to the poor (as far as we know), he certainly stuck it to "the man" at a time when the US was undergoing an economic downturn. In an era when skyjackings were common, and most were political and violent, the DB Cooper case has something of the fairy tale about it.

A LEAP OF FAITH

It was meant to be a regular Thanksgiving eve flight. People were heading home or to visit relatives on the afternoon of 24 November 1971, and no one had any reason to suspect that Northwest Orient Airlines Flight 305 from Portland International Airport would be anything but the usual short-haul 30-minute flight north to Seattle. One of the passengers buying a \$20 single one-way



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such as 8° exists at
ground level between
Kelso and Longview

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Magnetic disturbance of an
as 6° exists at ground level just
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North Plains

Banks

Forest Grove

Gaston

Tigard

Boring

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Eagle Creek

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Oregon City

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NORTHWEST ORIENT
PASSENGER TICKET AND BAGGAGE CHECK
FLIGHT COUPON NO. 1
DATE OF ISSUE: 11/24/71
AIRLINE FORM: 012-14 4406773
PORTLAND
183
TO: SEATTLE
FROM: PORTLAND
CLASS: Y
FARE BASIS: 305
FARE: 18.52
TAXES: 1.48
TOTAL: 20.00
TICKET NUMBER: 012 144406773 0

ticket for that flight was a formally dressed middle-aged man who identified himself only as “Dan Cooper” (the more widely used “DB Cooper” comes from a misunderstanding by the press, which we’ll get to later). Cooper, 6ft (1.8m) tall and in his mid-40s, settled in to seat 18C, put his briefcase to one side, and calmly ordered a bourbon and soda. Eyewitnesses seated near him recalled a man wearing a black suit and tie, the common attire of an American businessman.

The flight, which was just one-third full, took off from Portland at 2.50pm Pacific Standard Time, exactly as scheduled. Almost immediately after take-off, Cooper attracted the attention of then 23-year-old flight attendant Florence Schaffner who was seated near him by the aft-door. He passed her a folded piece of paper. Schaffner was used to this: a lonely businessman looking for company, passing his phone number to a supposedly ‘available’ air stewardess. She put the note in her uniform pocket, unread. Cooper, clearly unhappy with this development, leaned over to Schaffner and reportedly said: “Miss, you’d better look at that note. I have a bomb.”

The actual text of the note – written in felt tip pen, all in caps, neatly drafted – is unknown, as after Schaffner read it, Cooper took it back. The flight attendant recalled it mentioned a bomb and instructed her to sit in the vacant seat next to Cooper. She asked Cooper to show her the bomb. He opened his briefcase offering Schaffner the briefest glimpse of eight sticks of dynamite attached to insulated wires and a large battery: a bomb straight out of a Looney Tunes cartoon.

Cooper then outlined his demands: \$200,000 in cash, four parachutes, and a fuel truck to be on stand-by at Seattle to refuel the plane. Schaffner left Cooper and went to the flight deck to inform the captain of the situation. When she returned, Cooper had donned a pair of dark sunglasses. Captain William A Scott informed air traffic control at Seattle-Tacoma airport of the hijacking.

The 35 passengers remained unaware of the unfolding drama, with the captain informing them that arrival in Seattle would be delayed due to a minor technical fault. A message was relayed from the boss of Northwest, Donald Nyrop: the ransom would be

paid and all aboard the flight were to fully co-operate with the hijacker’s demands. The plane then circled above Puget Sound for almost two hours – over water in case the bomb was detonated – while the parachutes were obtained and the ransom put together. The FBI kept a record of the serial numbers of each \$20 bill. The parachutes – Cooper had specified civilian chutes – were obtained from a local Seattle flying school.

Cooper remained cool throughout, with Schaffner later describing the hijacker as “calm, polite, and well-spoken”. This did not fit with the stereotype of the politically motivated skyjackings carried out by agitated hot-heads who were often aggressive in their demands. Between 1968 and 1972, more than 130 American planes were hijacked, a rate of one every couple of weeks or so. Cooper simply calmly bided his time, ordering a second bourbon and soda, and even offering to pay his tab.

The Boeing aircraft finally landed at Seattle-Tacoma at 5.39pm, by which time the sun had set. The cash was delivered in a large bag weighing 21lb (9.5kg) and the parachutes were loaded aboard by 22-year-old flight attendant Tina Mucklow via the

aft stairs, an access point unique to the Boeing 727. Cooper allowed the passengers as well as the flight crew, including Schaffner but not Mucklow, to leave the plane. Only Captain Scott, Mucklow and the essential cockpit crew remained. Cooper instructed them to fly the plane south-west towards Mexico City at a low altitude of 10,000ft (3,000m). The landing gear was to remain deployed and the cabin unpressurised. With a limited range of approximately 1,000 miles (1,600km) under those flight conditions, Cooper agreed to a landing at Reno airport in Nevada to again refuel the aircraft. Cooper insisted that the aft stairs be lowered during flight, and he left the crew and Mucklow in the cockpit. It was the last any of them would see of the mystery hijacker. At about 8.12pm, when the cockpit crew felt a sudden jolt from the tail section, Cooper jumped from the plane into a growing rain storm...

THE MAN, THE MYTH, THE LEGEND

More or less everything from the point Cooper exited the plane has to be supposition, as nothing has ever been proven. Two fighter aircraft shadowed the flight, but neither pilot saw Cooper jump or a parachute unfurl. No one knows if he even survived the drop to the ground – no body or remains have ever been found in the five decades since. The supposition has to be that Cooper was an experienced skydiver who perhaps knew something about aircraft. He’d carried out a careful plan to the letter, escaped from the plane and disappeared into the night with \$200,000 in cash.

At around 10.30pm, the plane landed at Reno. An armed search revealed that Cooper was no longer onboard. An FBI investigation was launched and statements were taken from all those involved. Mucklow’s last sight of Cooper was of him fastening what appeared to be the bulky money bag



TOP: “Dan Cooper’s” ticket for Northwest Orient Airlines Flight 305 from Portland. ABOVE: The crew of the hijacked plane: Stewardess Tina Mucklow (right), Captain Bill Scott (centre) and First officer Bill Rataczak (left).



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

ABOVE: Northwest Airlines Boeing 727 N467US, hijacked on a flight from Portland to Seattle, sits on the ground after arrival at Reno, Nevada – sans DB Cooper.
BELOW: One of the items left behind by Cooper when he jumped from the aircraft was this JC Penney Towncraft clip-on tie.

around his waist. Among the items found on the plane that were suspected to have belonged to Cooper were a JC Penney Towncraft clip-on tie, a series of cigarette butts (Cooper smoked eight Raleigh Filter Tip cigarettes; they were destroyed, as DNA detection was not sophisticated enough for them to be of any use), and two of the four parachutes (Cooper having apparently used one to jump, taking another as a back-up). A total of 66 unidentified latent fingerprints were gathered from the interior of the aircraft. Composite images of the man calling himself “Dan Cooper” were drawn up, and have remained the only images of the Portland hijacker available to this day.

Ever literal minded, the first thing local law enforcement did was round up an Oregon man named DB Cooper in the hope that this otherwise clever hijacker had somehow decided to use his real name. This DB Cooper had a minor record, so Portland police pulled him in. Although he was quickly ruled out as the culprit, a reporter confused the suspect’s name with the name (Dan Cooper) given by the hijacker, so the mystery man became known thereafter as “DB Cooper”.

Searching for where Cooper might have landed proved difficult, given the sheer size of the dense, forest-covered area into which he had jumped, wearing just a suit and loafers. The search was further complicated by the speed and trajectory of the plane and the point in his free-fall that Cooper might have pulled the chord on his chute. The best guess put his landing in the south-western region of Mount St Helens, perhaps in the vicinity of Lake Merwin, an artificial water feature formed by a dam on the Lewis River. An extensive search, on foot and by helicopter, proved fruitless, as were subsequent searches in 1972. No trace of Cooper, dead or alive, or any of his equipment or the bulk of the money was ever found.

The money itself, meticulously recorded

HE DESCRIBED THE HIJACKER AS "CALM, POLITE AND WELL-SPOKEN"

by the FBI, was felt to be a potential lead. If Cooper, or anyone else, used those bills, there might be a chance of tracing them. Northwest Orient offered a \$25,000 reward for the return of the money (or any portion thereof). By 1973 the serial numbers had been publicly released and several Portland and Seattle area newspapers offered re-

wards for the return of any matching bills.¹ By Thanksgiving 1974, three years on from the hijack, nothing had turned up. By 1975, Global Indemnity Co. had paid \$180,000 to Northwest in insurance. By the mid-1970s, the mystery of DB Cooper passed into the realms of myth, legend, and folklore.

LETTERS FROM AMERICA

From the very beginning, the Cooper case was a media sensation. Coverage initially focused on the details of the heist, portraying Cooper as an almost unknowable enigma, and the FBI investigation, but when no immediate progress was made, the story slowly faded from the headlines. Coverage in the years that followed began to focus on Cooper himself, especially once the case was settled by the payment of insurance to the airline. Who was this guy, so cool



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ABOVE LEFT: Eight-year-old Brian Ingram shows where he found three bundles of decomposed \$20 dollar bills in 1980. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Some of the decomposed bills, the serial numbers of which matched the ransom money. **BELOW:** A canvas parachute bag left behind by Cooper when he jumped from the aircraft.

under pressure, who somehow carried out a seemingly flawless plan, escaped with his ill-gotten gains and has never been heard of since? There was an anti-Establishment feeling of 'good for him', as he'd managed to pull off a James Bond-style criminal caper at a time of economic distress.

In a weird echo of the infamous Jack the Ripper case, a series of six letters were received by the media that claimed to be from the infamous DB Cooper (rather than Dan Cooper). The letters varied – some were hand-written, some typed, and some made up of letters cut from newspapers or magazines. The first was received as early as 29 November 1971 by the *Reno Evening Gazette*. It had been franked in Glendale, California, and was made from letters cut from the *Sacramento Bee*. It simply said: "Attention! Thanks for the hospitality. Was in a rut." A second letter, post-marked one day later and hand-written, received by the *Vancouver Province* newspaper, read: "The composite drawing on page 3, as suspected by the FBI, does not represent the truth." A third letter, made up of cut-out letters from *Playboy*, mailed in north Oregon and post-marked 1 December 1971, arrived at the *Portland Oregonian*. It read: "Am alive and doing well in hometown." The fourth letter, also mailed on 1 December, but from Sacramento, went to the *Reno Evening Gazette* and advised: "Plan ahead for retirement income."

The fifth and sixth letters were withheld by the FBI until the early 2000s. A Freedom of Information request by a documentary filmmaker saw the fifth letter (post-marked 11 December 1971) finally released. It had been sent to multiple newspapers, including the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*, and was much longer than the others. Among other comments, the letter said: "I knew from the start that I wouldn't be caught. I didn't rob Northwest Orient because I thought



it would be romantic, heroic or any of the other euphemisms that seem to attach to situations of high risks. I'm no modern day Robin Hood. Unfortunately I do have only 14 months to live." The sixth letter, to the *Portland Oregonian* and post-marked 28 March 1972 from Jacksonville, Florida, was signed "A Rich Man". Part of it read: "I am not dead, but really alive and just back from the Bahamas, so your silly troopers up there can stop looking for me... I like your articles about me but you can stop them now, DB Cooper is not real... I am going around the world and they will never find me because I am smarter than the system's lackey cops..."

The documentary filmmakers claimed to have found hidden codes in the lengthy fifth and sixth letters that they decoded to read: "I'm Lt. Robert W Rackstraw." Lawyer and Cooper investigator Galen Cook took a different view, claiming to have found evidence within the letters that linked to his favoured culprit, William Gossett (see below). The letters were analysed by the FBI labs in 2014, but nothing was ever established to prove whether the Northwest hijacker sent them or not.

There appeared to be a break in the case

in February 1980 when eight-year-old Brian Ingram, camping with his family, dug up decaying bundles of \$20 bills on the Tena Bar beachfront of the Columbia River. The bills, still bundled in rubber bands, were handed to the FBI. They turned out to be two packets of 100 \$20 bills and one packet of 90 \$20 bills, totalling \$5,800. They matched the serial numbers of the bills given to Cooper and were still bundled up in the exact way they had been when handed over. It was unclear whether the bills were part of a deliberately buried stash that had been left behind or had washed up on Tena Bar beach having floated downriver (and if so, what happened to the missing 10 \$20 bills from the third packet?). Scientific studies of the bills did not offer clear support for either hypothesis.

After a lengthy period of analysis and negotiation, in 1986 half of the recovered \$20 bills were returned to Brian Ingram (by then aged 14), while the other half went to Northwest's insurers. The FBI retained several 'sample' bills as evidence. Ingram later sold 15 of his Cooper heist \$20 bills in 2008, raising \$37,000. He retains the rest of the remaining Cooper money.

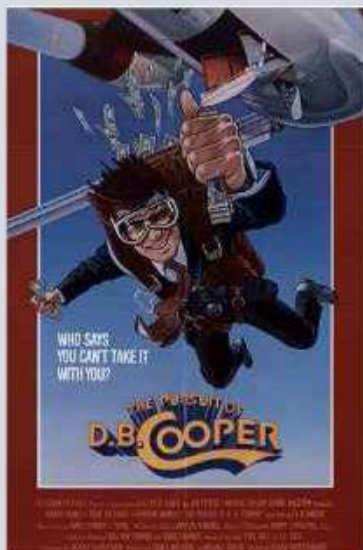
The DB Cooper Media Phenomenon

The DB Cooper case has formed the basis of multiple documentaries, movies, books, and TV shows. Several TV documentaries have tackled the basics. Among many others, there was a 1979 episode of the Leonard Nimoy-presented show *In Search of...* that featured the lead FBI agent on the case, Ralph Himmelsbach; a 1988 episode of *Unsolved Mysteries* presented by Robert Stack, which interviewed flight attendant Florence Schaffner; a 2011 episode of *Brad Meltzer's Decoded* that investigated the then recently named suspect Kenneth Christiansen; a 2017 episode of *Expedition Unknown* hosted by Josh Gates; and 2020's feature-length BBC/HBO documentary *The Mystery of DB Cooper*.

The earliest movie to feature the story was 1973's made-for-TV film *Deliver Us from Evil* which explored the aftermath of a Cooper-style air heist without making any specific references to the recent Northwest case. Starring George Kennedy, Bradford Dillman and Jan-Michael Vincent, the movie sees a group of hikers discover an injured hijacker who appears to have parachuted from an airplane with \$600,000. After they kill the hijacker, the men then fight each other over the money. That was followed by the theatrical release of *The Pursuit of D. B. Cooper* (1981), directed by Roger Spottiswoode and starring Treat Williams as Cooper and Robert Duvall as an insurance investigator on his case. That light-hearted caper movie was loosely based on a 1980 novel entitled *Free Fall* by JD Reed. In 2004's *Without a Paddle*, three friends (Matthew Lillard, Seth Green, and Dax Shepard) on a camping trip set out to search for the DB Cooper "treasure". Noir novelist James M Cain also tackled the aftermath of the case in his 1975 novel *Rainbow's End*.

Television drama series such as *Prison Break*, *Leverage*, and *The Blacklist* all featured characters revealed to be DB Cooper. Other shows, like

BELOW: The poster for the 1981 film *The Pursuit of DB Cooper* and Tom Hiddleston as Cooper (who was, it seems, the God of Mischief all along) in the 2021 series *Loki*.

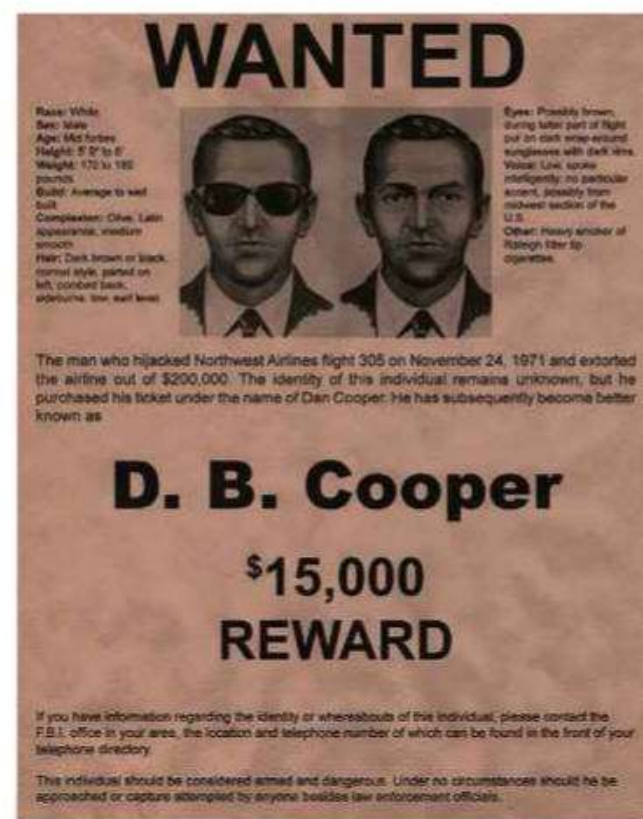


Breaking Bad, *NewsRadio*, *Journeyman*, *Renegade*, *30Rock*, and *Numb3rs* have made references to various aspects of the case, including the discovery of the \$20 bills. One intriguing fact is that *Twin Peaks* FBI agent Dale Cooper (Kyle McLachlan) has the middle name "Bartholomew", making him "DB Cooper".

There have been several songs about Cooper's exploits, including Chuck Brodsky's "The Ballad of D. B. Cooper", and punk-ska band Victim of Circumstance's "The Final Flight of D. B. Cooper". Other singers and groups with songs mentioning the Cooper heist include Bill Mallonee, Kid Rock, MK Doom, and the Mountain Goats.

The crazier media ideas about Cooper include the theory that the infamous director of *The Room* (2003), Tommy Wiseau, was Cooper and used his ransom money to fund the movie, or that the series *Mad Men* (2007-15) would conclude with the revelation that black-suited 1960s man of mystery Don Draper (Jon Hamm) would be revealed to be Dan Cooper (the ad agency in the show was called Cooper Sterling, leading to 'Don Cooper' perhaps?). More

recently, the Disney+ Marvel series *Loki* (2021) revealed in its opening episode that Tom Hiddleston's Loki was, in fact, DB Cooper, who hijacks the plane having lost a bet with his brother, Thor (Chris Hemsworth). To this day, the community of Ariel, Washington (one of the possible Cooper landing zones), maintains the tradition of annual "DB Cooper Days", usually taking place on the Saturday right after Thanksgiving. Even after five decades, the legend of DB Cooper remains undiminished.



ABOVE: A wanted poster for the "unknown" man who "has subsequently become better known as DB Cooper" and "should be considered armed and dangerous".

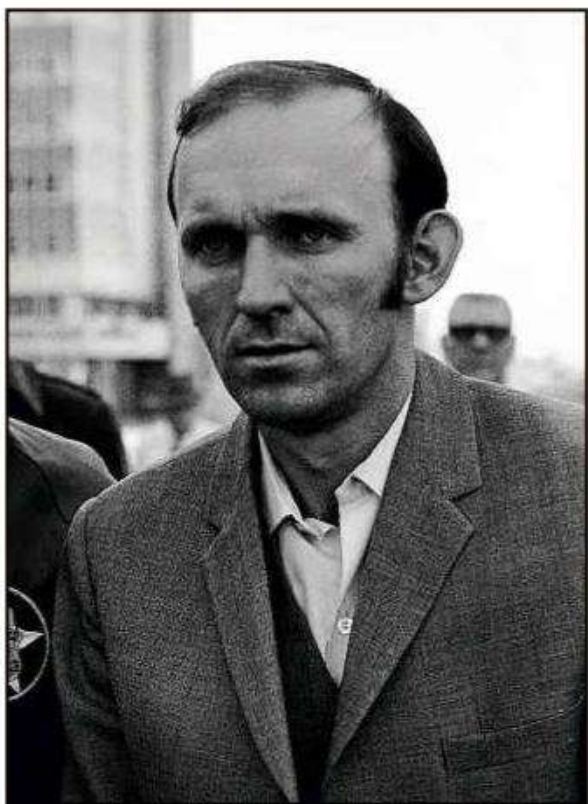
THE SUSPECTS

Despite the failure of the FBI investigation to apprehend anyone for the hijacking of Flight 305, a plethora of potential DB Cooper suspects have been uncovered, some by law enforcement, some by amateur and professional sleuths investigating the case, and some through self-admitted claims to be the hijacker. The FBI said it had worked through a list of 800 serious suspects, so only a handful of the more likely or more interesting can be examined in any detail.

One of the earliest claimants to the Cooper crown was Bryant 'Jack' Coffelt, who in 1972 attempted to interest Hollywood in 'his' story. His account of his escape from the plane was less than heroic: he claimed to have landed near Mount Hood, injuring himself and rather unfortunately losing all the ransom in the process. Although Coffelt bore some resemblance to the image of Cooper widely distributed, he was in his 50s. His claim was reviewed by the FBI but dismissed as it conflicted with information they'd held back from the public. That didn't stop Coffelt, a conman with a criminal record, who continued to peddle his claim to be Cooper to various news programmes. He died in 1975.

Another early suspect was John List, a war veteran who murdered his wife, three children, and 85-year-old mother in New Jersey two weeks before Cooper committed his hijacking. List vanished with the suspect figure of \$200,000, apparently withdrawn from his mother's bank account. The timing of List's multiple homicide and his reputed similarity to the Cooper illustration put him in the FBI's sights. List didn't resurface until 1989, when he was captured and imprisoned. Before his death in 2008, he admitted to the murders but denied being Cooper.

Another war veteran, Sheridan Peterson, was a technical editor at Boeing working in Seattle. He came to the attention of the FBI due to his activi-



ABOVE: Unusual suspects: (left-right) Richard McCoy Jr, Duane Weber and William J Smith. **BELOW:** Barbara (formerly Robert) Dayton claimed to have carried out the heist disguised as a man in revenge against the airline industry that had denied her a pilot's licence.

ties as a 'smokejumper', a firefighter who battles a blaze following a parachute jump. At 44, he was the right age, was an admitted physical risk-taker and resembled the FBI illustration of Cooper. He seemed to revel in his status as a suspect, playing along with the media and refusing to either confirm or deny his participation. Under pressure from the FBI, Peterson eventually claimed he had been in Nepal on a skydiving expedition at the time of the heist. He died in January this year, aged 94. Eric Ullis, a DB Cooper researcher, believes that Peterson had a "98 per cent" chance of being the hijacker.

One man outed himself as a DB Cooper suspect in 1972 by carrying out an almost identical copycat hijacking. Richard McCoy Jr was yet another Army veteran, having served in Vietnam and the US National Guard, and also an avid recreational skydiver. On 7 April 1972, McCoy boarded United Airlines Flight 855 in Denver, Colorado, then hijacked the plane brandishing what he claimed was a grenade (it was a paperweight) and an unloaded handgun. The plane was a Boeing 727 with aft stairs, the same as in the Cooper case. He demanded \$500,000 and four parachutes, all of which were delivered during a stop-over at San Francisco. After taking off again, McCoy bailed out over Provo, Utah, leaving behind his hand-written ransom note and a magazine he'd been reading covered with his fingerprints. He was arrested two days later, but his escapade proved that the original DB Cooper could have survived his jump. McCoy was sentenced to 45 years in jail, escaping in 1974, only to be shot dead by FBI agents three months later. The FBI agent who shot him later claimed: "When I shot Richard McCoy, I shot DB Cooper at the same time." However, the FBI claimed there was credible evidence that McCoy was in Las Vegas when Cooper carried out his hijack in Portland.

IN 2016 THE FBI CLOSED THE COOPER FILE, PENDING NEW EVIDENCE



Retired pilot and former convict Robert W Rackstraw came to the notice of the FBI in 1978 when he attempted to fake his own death through a false distress call as he bailed out of a rented plane over Monterey Bay. Arrested over forged pilot certificates, Rackstraw resembled the Cooper sketches, although he was aged 28 in 1971. Although he had military experience and parachute training, the FBI eliminated him as a suspect in 1979. His name re-emerged in 2016 when he was featured in a television show about the Cooper case. That same year, the FBI officially closed the Cooper file, pending any new evidence. It was suggested they'd done this to avoid Freedom of Information obligations that would have confirmed Rackstraw as Cooper, exposing their failure to prosecute him. Rackstraw, who had an intelligence background and died in 2019,

denied any connection with the Cooper heist. He did own a yacht named *Poverty Sucks*, though...

Other names put forward as Cooper suspects included Duane Weber, whose 1995 deathbed confession was used by his widow to claim he was the hijacker. Although there was some circumstantial evidence linking Weber to the case, the FBI dismissed the claim in 1998 as his fingerprints did not match any recovered from the aircraft. Kenneth Christensen was put forward as a suspect in 2003 by his brother, who saw a television show on Cooper and noted the resemblance between the 'mug shot' illustrations and Kenneth, who had war-time parachute experience and had died of cancer in 1994. At the time of the hijacking, 45-year-old Christensen had been a purser working on Northwest Orient, a smoker, and a bourbon drinker. A few months after, Christensen had reportedly bought a new house with cash (this was later disputed when evidence of a 17-year mortgage came to light). Just prior to his death, Christensen told his brother: "There is something you should know, but I cannot tell you." Following Christensen's death, it was discovered that he had a valuable stamp collection, multiple gold coins, and over \$200,000 in various bank accounts (the money was said to have come from recorded land sales). He also had a scrapbook of newspaper cuttings covering his time working for Northwest, from the 1950s until just before the hijacking. He was one of several suspects dismissed by the FBI, but he probably remains the single suspect who best fits all the known facts.

Parachute instructor and paranormal radio show host William Gossett died in 2003, but his claim to have carried out the Cooper hijacking wasn't revealed until 2008. Gossett was said to have been obsessed with the Cooper case, maintaining a collection of newspaper and magazine cuttings. Late in



ABOVE: William Gossett, who claimed to have been behind the 1971 hijacking.

life, he made claims to several friends and relatives that he'd been behind the hijacking. Gossett supposedly came into a substantial amount of cash just after the 1971 hijacking, but didn't keep it for long as he was a compulsive gambler (according to his sons). Similarly, Lynn Doyle Cooper (known as LD Cooper) was fingered by his niece as a suspect in 2011, long after his 1999 death, based upon vague memories she had as an eight-year-old of his curious conduct at the time of the hijacking. In 2018, military veteran and one-time member of the Michigan Parachute Team Walter R Reca, who had died in 2014, was 'outed' as Cooper by a friend. Also in 2018, the late William J Smith (died November 2018) was proposed as a suspect by a newspaper. Aged 43 at the time of the heist, Smith lost his pension in 1970 due to a corporate bankruptcy, giving him motive. His high school friend Ira Daniel Cooper was killed in action during the war, a possible source for the "Dan Cooper" name. Photos of Smith, both younger and in his more mature years, bear an amazing similarity to the FBI sketches.

Perhaps the most bonkers claimant to be Cooper was Barbara Dayton, who'd been born in 1926 as "Robert Dayton" prior to gender reassignment surgery. Dayton had served in the US Marines and Army, and had aspired to become a commercial airline pilot. She claimed to have carried out the hijack disguised as a man in revenge against the airline industry that had denied her a pilot's licence. She also claimed to have hidden the ransom money in suburban Portland, before recanting the entire story while claiming she was only doing so having learned that hijacking charges could still be brought against her. Dayton died in 2002.

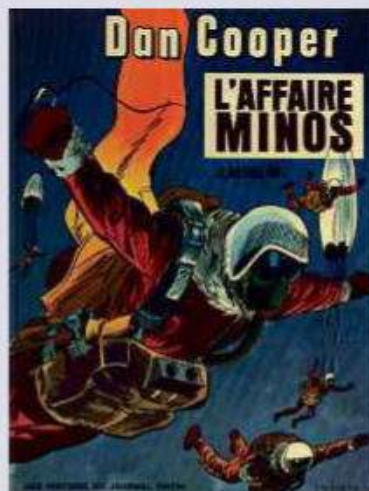
THE COOPER VORTEX

So, what happened to the invisible man the world knows as DB Cooper? If he were still

Dan Cooper: The Comic Book Connection

The DB Cooper heist has a bizarre link to a relatively obscure French language Belgian comic book.

Les Aventures de Dan Cooper was a *bande dessinée* (essentially a graphic novel) established in 1954 by writer and illustrator Albert Weinberg. This Dan Cooper was a Royal Canadian Air Force flying ace (who also occasionally flew rocket ships to the moons of Mars). Several of the eyewitnesses to the Cooper caper suggested there was something off about the hijacker's accent, which led to speculation that he might have been Canadian. If that was the case, maybe he was familiar with the Dan Cooper comic books published in



French (they have never been translated into English) in Francophone

Canada. Alternatively, if the hijacker had military experience (suggested by the parachute jump and general awareness of how things worked on an aircraft), he might have come across the comics while serving in Europe. Either way, these comics could be the source of the "Dan Cooper" nom-de-crime used for the hijacking. One comic book cover shows

Cooper parachuting out of a plane, while another story concerned the payment of a ransom in a knapsack, just as requested by DB Cooper. Like the DB Cooper mystery, the *Dan Cooper* comic books are still going strong...

alive, 50 years after the hijacking, he'd be in his 90s by now. He probably died long ago, either on the night of the hijacking itself or sometime in the decades following. The hijacking was a daring exploit, but the jump from 10,000ft into a dark and stormy night dressed in a business suit seems desperate. The chutes weren't steerable and the tree-covered terrain was treacherous. The temperature and wind were both brutal. Could "Dan Cooper" have even made it to the ground alive? If he didn't, why hasn't a body ever been found? A skeleton uncovered in the drop zone was determined to be female. No other remains connected to the Cooper case have ever turned up. But if he didn't survive, why was no one matching the DB Cooper description ever reported missing?

It seems the most intriguing mysteries must remain unsolved, allowing armchair detectives, caught up in the Cooper Vortex, to come up with their own answers, which can never be entirely disproven. There have been some crazy theories as to who DB Cooper really was and how he pulled off the perfect crime. One of the most out-there posits that Cooper was in fact Alcatraz escapee Frank Lee Morris who fled the island jail on a raft in 1962. Not only was Morris really Cooper, he was also the Zodiac killer according to this theory. Given the geographical location of the Cooper hijacking, he might as well have been the Sasquatch too. Or maybe Bigfoot ate DB Cooper. Alternatively, perhaps he was a Man in Black, scooped up by a waiting flying saucer? It makes almost as much sense as any other explanation, and there's nothing out there to say it didn't happen...

Cooper's biggest legacy, apart from the enduring mystery, has been oppressive

flight security. Airlines in the US had resisted the most basic of pre-flight checks for domestic flights, preferring to rely on the deterrent of armed sky marshals. Although the experience was not pleasant for Schaffner, Mucklow or the cockpit crew, no one was harmed during the hijacking, and most passengers remained unaware of it until after they'd landed. Cooper got away with \$200,000, but didn't spend it – or he managed to launder it so effectively that few of the easily identified bills ever turned up.

The fact is that the black-suited, sunglasses-wearing figure of "DB Cooper" is an effective *tabula rasa* onto which anything or anyone can be projected by contemporary culture. Like Amelia Earhart (FT123:18, 289:38-43, 306:7) and Jimmy Hoffa, the Cooper case is one of America's most notorious unsolved disappearances, as well as one of the country's greatest heists. The legend lives on; but, five decades after the event, the question of just who "DB Cooper" really was can probably never be solved.

NOTES

1 When the serial numbers of the ransom payment were released to the public domain, it didn't take long for counterfeiters to create several fake \$20 bills that appeared to come from the Cooper hoard. Some were able to con former *Newsweek* magazine reporter Karl Fleming into paying \$30,000 for the hijacker's story, including an interview with a man they claimed falsely was DB Cooper. The two con men were later arrested in Seattle.

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UNFATHOMABLE LEGENDS

Armed with nothing more than a plumb line, intrepid geologist **SHARON A HILL** descends into the world's bottomless lakes, yawning pits and wells to Hell in order to separate fact from folklore.

There are countless holes in the ground: some are full of water, some are open voids. The obvious question one might ask upon encountering a hole, pond or lake is: "How deep is it?" The answer isn't so obvious. Legends and tall tales have always emanated from these holes, exaggerating their depths and dangers.

The dark hole is universally scary. As light cannot penetrate far into the depths, the mind assumes an opening without an obvious terminus has no bottom at all. Perhaps objects thrown into the hole disappear. The listener may hear no splash or crack of a test projectile hitting a surface below. The weighted rope may never touch the bottom. When we can't readily discern the depth, the hole acquires additional legendary characteristics. Whatever is down there might be unknown, but it is undoubtedly unpleasant. Thus, the bottomless pit or lake is a common folklore motif and a media horror trope: the threat is not only from the sheer bottomlessness of the hole, but also from whatever nasty things exist in such a forsaken abyss.¹

There are countless tales of bottomless lakes, pools, and bogs worldwide that claim people (dead or alive), animals, treasure and vehicles, and that continue to hold many secrets. Here, I explore themes used widely for local holes, pools and lakes in order to mark their cultural significance and I connect them to their geological foundations.

FOLKLORE

In a practical sense, "bottomless" simply means that someone tried to establish the bottom depth and failed. Naturally, locals would be concerned about an open hole or pool that they might fall into, so they would logically attempt to plumb it with an available oar or tree branch or sapling. Others will try dropping a weighted line and feeling



LEFT: The Dozmary Pool, Bodmin Moor, Cornwall, was said to have an outlet to the sea 10.5 miles (16.9 km) away. It is important for migrating birds, native plants, and for its preservation of vegetation since the last Ice Age, but most famous as the location where King Arthur received the sword Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake. The lake dried up in 1866 and again in 1869 and 1976 proving that it indeed had a bottom. **RIGHT:** A picture taken on 8 November 2014 shows a scientist exploring a newly discovered crater on the Yamal Peninsula, northern Siberia.

THE BOTTOMLESS PIT IS A COMMON FOLKLORE MOTIF AND HORROR TROPE

for it to hit bottom. If those methods fail, then, by default, the opening is declared "bottomless". Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of openings and water bodies were said at one time or another to be bottomless. Legends live on – even into modern times when suitable technology can give us the real answer, which is sometimes ignored in lieu of a far more entertaining myth.

The bottomless pit has long been a recognised supernatural trope; it frequently includes additional dramatic features, such as having bizarre inhabitants, emitting strange sounds, or having strange or paranormal properties. William Corliss, collector of anomalies, wrote that the accounts of such pits "smack of sensationalism and must be taken with several grains of salt."² And, of course, bottomless pits cannot be discussed without a mention of their connection to

Hell and damnation.

Any body of water without a discernible depth will frequently be associated with the imaginative interpretation that it has an outlet or tunnel to another water body, or the sea, sometimes hundreds of miles away. Even if a lake has an established floor, local tales often mention a cave passage somewhere within the perimeter where the true danger lurked; swimmers were warned of the peril from an icy cold swell or sucking whirlpool. Bottomless Lakes State Park in New Mexico has eight lakes that acquired their name when local herdsman could not discern the bottom via ropes. The green-blue colour comes from algæ and makes the pools look tranquil but ultra-deep. Bottomless Lakes are the result of sinkholes that extend below the level of the water table ("cenotes"). The legend attached to the lakes includes the idea that they are connected to each other and to Carlsbad Caverns (90 miles/145km away) or the Gulf of Mexico (600 miles/966km away) through subterranean passages. While that distance is plausible as a regional water pathway, it is *not* remotely plausible for objects of any size, such as an animal or person, to traverse such a system. The Bottomless Lakes have resident monsters, described as giant turtles.³





ABOVE: Lake Vouliagmeni in Greece: home to evil fairy folk. **BELOW:** A sculpture at Binstead knucker hole in Sussex commemorates its resident monster.

DEEP WATER SPIRITS AND MONSTERS

Marie Bonaparte noted that the idea of the “unfathomable” was almost always applied to still waters, not to the ocean or rivers. The ocean, while clearly deeper, moved, ebbed, and flowed. Rivers, too, were in motion, and occasionally revealed their bottoms. But stagnant waters have always made us uneasy with their silence. Bonaparte wrote that a correspondent told her of Welsh legends in which the lakes had their own personalities and might resent being measured. The legend of Bala Lake (or Llyn Tegid) in Wales tells of the voice of the lake crying out “Line cannot fathom me. Go, or I will swallow you up” and no one tried since. Bala Lake was also rumoured to hold a dragon or lake monster.⁴

Lake Vouliagmeni in Greece was said to suck people in via a whirlpool, or they might be nabbed by the evil fairy folk living at the bottom. The lake had formed from a cavern roof collapse after an earthquake some 2,000 years ago. No one had managed to sound the bottom because it was part of an extensive cave system that continued under the mountain. Some divers trying to explore the underwater caves have perished. It’s possible that a strong deep current may have manifested at times, creating a visible swirling effect.⁵

Michel Meurger eruditely wrote about the tradition of lake monsters in Europe and North America in his book *Lake Monster Traditions*. Two qualities of a lake, he observed, indicated the almost certain presence of a legendary monster. First, dark water.

EVIL CREATURES WOULD REACH UP AND DRAG PEOPLE INTO THE WATERS



Second, it was deemed “unfathomable”. As “bottomless” represents an unknown, it’s a small leap of thought to assume the presence of monsters. We find many legends of bottomless lakes associated with a resident monster.⁶

Glacial lakes can be particularly steep-sided and deep. Loch Ness, in Scotland’s glacially-scoured Great Glen, boasts a seriously impressive depth of 745ft (227m) and dark, peat-stained water: it’s perfectly situated to host a monster legend. Storytellers supposed that the Loch bottom had hidden caverns that connected to the ocean to the northeast, thus providing a passage for the world’s most famous lake cryptid.

The characteristic of “bottomless” is also associated with the idea that a lake does not “give up its dead”. This is suggestive of some evil entity or of the lake itself as a living thing that takes sacrifices. Not so many decades ago, Llyn Dulyn in Snowdonia, North Wales, was regarded as a dangerous “bottomless” lake where evil creatures would reach up from the depths and drag people down into the dark waters. The many superstitions associated with the lake were bolstered by actual tragedies that happened there. The glacial cirque “black lake” bottoms out at about 190ft (58m). In *The Mabinogion*, translated by Lady Charlotte Guest (1877), it was said that fish in the lake are strange and deformed and that birds do not visit it. This idea is invalidated by the fact that perfectly fine brown trout and char do live in the lake.⁷ Birds may be uncommon on the lake for other reasons, perhaps because of the high surrounding cliffs.

Lake Ronkonkoma is the biggest and

deepest lake of Long Island, New York. Natives thought the lake was bottomless because the bodies of those who drowned there were not always recovered. Even though the lake is only, at most, 70ft (21m) deep, the myth persists. Again, the lack of visibility in the lake is such that an object (or person) submerged 10ft (3m) or more disappears from the view of the surface observer.⁸

Knucker holes are “bottomless” ponds that do not freeze or dry up.⁹ The term is used primarily in Europe. These legendary spots might hold healing waters or a dragon. The name comes from the old Saxon word “nicor” meaning water spirit or monster. It is not clear if the knuckers made the holes or just found them convenient places to occupy. They can be dangerous, as the water is constantly cold and the sides may be steep, making it hard to climb out.

A knucker hole in Burgess’s Field, Binstead, Sussex, was once pumped dry. The men saw the muddy bottom but assumed the resident monster was hiding under the mud as the groundwater continually flowed in. Knucker holes are springs. They are usually around 20ft (6m) across, with the water remaining at a consistent level suggesting a large or distant recharge area. There are famous knuckerholes at Lyminster, Lancing, Shoreham, Worthing and other flat areas of the South Downs. In Sompting, local lore from the 1940s described a very dangerous bottomless hole that swallowed a cart – horse and all.¹⁰

The Madonna Pond in Binstead was said to be haunted by the coach and horse that fell in and were never retrieved. In Lyminster, people tried to find the bottom of the local hole by tying the six bell ropes of the church together. No luck. Divers eventually discovered it was about 30ft (9m) deep, but that failed to squelch the rumour of the hole’s unfathomable depth. Attempting to feel the bottom of a knucker hole with a weighted line is likely to be unsuccessful



JEFF HOLLETT / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

ABOVE: Thor’s well is a spectacular feature along the Oregon coast near Yachats. The seemingly bottomless hole swallows all the seawater that flows in, appearing to drain the ocean. In fact, it’s only about 20ft (6m) deep. The water recirculates in and out of the hole.

due to the combination of the upwelling water and the soft mud floor.

HELL HOLES AND HOAX HOLES

The “bottomless pit” or abyss is mentioned in Revelation 9 in the Bible as a direct passage to Hell at the centre of the Earth. In Revelation 20, an angel throws Satan, in the form of a serpent or dragon, back into the pit before sealing it. There are many stories that suggest the passage to Hell still exists.

The Youdig marshland of Yeun Elez in Brittany, France, is loaded with legends and lore of a bottomless bog, which is said to be an entrance to Hell that swallows damned souls. Priests sent the demons from exorcisms into black dogs, which were then forc-

ibly drowned in the bog. Crossing a bog is treacherous as apparently dry land can suddenly turn liquid. The Youdig also was home to ghost lights. These mysterious flames may have formed from an unknown reaction of swamp gases, though locals thought of them as will o’ the wisps, spirits or fairies that lured people to their doom. Gas release probably accounts for the stories of the swamp boiling and bubbling.¹¹

A legendary bottomless pit that was said to have released demons and monsters was situated beneath Houska Castle in the Czech Republic (see **FT346:70-73**). The castle was supposedly constructed in the mid-13th century to surround and cover the hole to Hell that had spontaneously formed. Spirits and beasts from the underworld



AMANDA HINULT / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

ABOVE: The Youdig marshland of Yeun Elez, one of Brittany’s most legend-haunted landscapes, full of bottomless bogs, mysterious ghostlights and demonic dogs.



ABOVE LEFT: The Bottomless Pit of Haleakala in Hawaii. A 10-ft (3m) wide opening rimmed with lava ejecta. Debris chokes the hole at about 65ft (20m) down. Legend has it that parents disposed of their babies' umbilical cords in this volcanic vent as a magical ritual to give the child positive qualities. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A Hell hole is said to be found beneath the chapel of Hrad Houska in the Czech Republic. **BELOW:** The recent Russian film *Superdeep* spliced together the stories of the 'Well to Hell' and the Kola Superdeep Borehole – the deepest manmade hole on Earth – in an attempt to tap into our fears about what lurks beneath.

sometimes escaped to torment the locals. Geologically, the area is limestone, so we might speculate that a natural karst fissure or sinkhole was the inspiration for the pit. According to legend, prisoners were put into the hole and promised release if they could climb back out; one story says that a particular fellow who did make his way out aged 30 years after only being in the hole for a short time. Little of the above has much credibility and can probably be filed under the heading of tall tales. The supposed hole, by the way, is under the floor of the chapel. ¹²

The story of the Houska Hell Hole castle sounds awfully similar to a more modern version - the wholly constructed legend of Mel's Hole of Ellensburg, Washington (see FT374:26). If you search for "bottomless hole" on the Internet, you'll find this crazy story ranked high in the results blending the usual tropes with more modern supernatural ideas.

A man calling himself "Mel Waters" appeared on Art Bell's *Coast to Coast AM* radio show in February 1997. He claimed to be the owner of a property seized by the US government on which was located a mysterious hole associated with very weird goings-on. He said locals had long known of the hole, which was surrounded by a low stone wall, and would throw garbage in it. Waters said he used 80,000ft (24,384m) of fishing line in an attempt to measure it before giving up. That depth equates to 15 miles (24km)! We can readily conclude

Waters was fibbing, or at best exaggerating, as it is entirely impractical for a single person to hand-measure to that depth. The weight of the line itself (at least 40lb/80kg) would mask the feeling of a weighted end hitting bottom. Not only will you have most certainly encountered the groundwater table beyond about 500ft (152m), but the geothermal gradient would make the temperature at this depth hot enough to melt the line. ¹³

There were plenty of indicators that Mel's hole was a hoax. The location was never specified, and it was never found. Additional bizarre features

attributed to Mel's Hole were a beam of 'black' (it couldn't really be called 'light') and historical radio signals emanating from the hole. ¹⁴ A frequently retold story from Waters was that a dog carcass was thrown into the hole... and the dog was later seen alive. There was even a claim of metals changing form in the hole.

Local geologist Jack Powell knew the claims were ridiculous and figured that the story might be based on an old goldmine shaft in a field

northwest of Ellensburg. His explanation was generally ignored, and the tall tales propagated. ¹⁵ Eventually, the undocumented hole was identified by its promoters as a top-secret government project involving an underground alien base.

Another famous hoax, the "Well to Hell", was unique in that it came with a soundtrack of voices of the damned. The

story goes that workers on a drilling project in an unnamed remote location in Siberia sunk a hole 14.4km (8.9 miles) deep before breaking through to a cavity from which they heard and recorded screaming voices and measured searing heat.

This tale was first published and referenced by Christian newsletters (see FT59:16, 72:42-43, 346:41). In 1989, religious network Trinity Broadcasting picked up the story and, without fact-checking, framed it as legitimate news with the headline: "Scientists Discover Hell". In 1990, Rich Buhler, a radio host for *Christianity Today*, tracked the story back to a propaganda article based on a fabricated account. The audio associated with the story may have come from a horror movie. ¹⁶

CAN BOTTOMLESS HOLES EXIST?

Hypothetically, a truly bottomless hole would go through the Earth and come out the other side. This feature would be impossible to create and a physical conundrum in terms of "falling" into it. Since "falling" is a function of gravity, the physics of such a hole get weird. After about 20 hours of falling, one would reach the centre of the Earth, then get stuck in the core – trapped in the gravitational centre. If there was no air in the hole, however, things would go *much* faster. You might pop out the other end of the hole due to momentum, but then get sucked back in from the gravity pull. ¹⁷

Geologically, naturally deep holes are commonly caused by limestone dissolution processes (resulting in karst features like sinkholes and caverns that may be connected to extensive natural underground drainage systems). Attempts to fill in a sinkhole often result in the material eventually disappearing in the subterranean openings, leading to rumours that the hole is bottom-





VASILY BOGOVALENSKY / APF VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The earth occasionally opens up dramatically. Craters formed from melting permafrost in Siberia look very much like bottomless holes. The first of these craters was discovered in July 2014. The current explanation for thermokarst is that they are formed from the collapse of previously frozen ground. No one has seen one form so it's unclear if it happens explosively or gradually. The holes may also release large volumes of methane.

less. Glacial processes create deep “kettle holes” in flat areas, or steep-sided lakes cut into solid rock. Tectonic rifting or subduction areas result in topographically dramatic valleys and abyssal ocean trenches.

The deepest natural pits in the world include the Devil’s Sinkhole, Rocksprings, Texas at 400ft (122m) and Dean’s Blue Hole, Long Island, Bahamas at 650ft (198m), both karst features. Mining created the Chuquibambilla Copper Mine, in Chile at 2,790ft (850m). Lake Baikal in Russia is the world’s deepest lake; located in a rift valley, the average depth is over 2,000ft (610m) with the maximum depth measured at 5,387ft (1.64km). The deepest spot in the ocean is 35,814ft (11km) below sea level, part of the Mariana Trench between Guam and the Philippines called the Challenger Deep.¹⁸

The Kola Superdeep Borehole is the deepest manmade hole on Earth at 40,230ft (12.3km).¹⁸ Started in 1970, the drilling project at the Kola peninsula of Russia, near the Norway border, was shut down in 1992. Holes this deep need reinforcement and cooling due to pressure and the thermal gradient. Excavating equipment fails at about 12km down. The Kola project collected interesting mineralogical and biological data. A 2008 oil well in Qatar achieved a longer borehole length at 40,320ft (12.3km), but did not exceed the Kola reach in depth below sea level. The plot of a recently released Russian movie *The Superdeep* merges the story of the Kola borehole with the “Well to Hell” story – a natural amalgamation for a horror movie – with predictable monstrous results.

There aren’t many explanations for the claims of bottomless holes. The most obvious is that people exaggerated or outright lied about the supposed depth of such holes. Encountering karst openings may have led to people believing they found a bottomless hole. Even today, some imaginative people believe that real or rumoured holes are evidence of a secret military project, an ancient city, or evidence of a Hollow Earth. Modern mysterious holes are endowed with speculative suggestions that could be wormholes or entrances to another dimension. It is also fun to imagine they are the gaping mouth of a subterranean creature or that the Earth itself is a living thing that would eat us. Clearly, “bottomless” is not a term to be taken literally, but the unfathomable nature of various pits, lakes and bogs worldwide is an essential feature of a mythological and enchanted landscape.

NOTES

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- 2 William Corliss, *Carolina Bays, Mima Mounds, Submarine Canyons and Other Topographical Phenomena: A Catalog of Geological Anomalies*, 1988.
- 3 See https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/tour/state/bottomless_lakes/home.html; ER Harrington, “Sinkholes, Bottomless Lakes, and the Pecos River”, *Scientific Monthly*, 84: 6, 302-308, 1957.
- 4 Marie Bonaparte, “The Legend of the Unfathomable Waters”, *American Imago*, 4: 1, 20-31, 1946.
- 5 See <https://steemit.com/steemit/@vanessa11val/the-mystery-of-lake-vouliagmeni-the-secrets-of-the-haunted-lake-greece>
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9 See www.binsted.org/folklore

10 See www.sussexarch.org.uk/saaf/dragon.html#main4

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12 See <http://magicbohemia.magic-realist.com/2018/05/21/houska-castle-guards-a-pit-to-hell/>; S Philbrook and F Burgess, *Astonishing Legends* podcast “Houska Castle”, Episodes 1 and 2. <https://www.astonishinglegends.com/>

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REVISITING ARTHUR C CLARKE'S MYSTERIOUS WORLD PART 3

Just over 40 years ago, unsuspecting ITV viewers were taken on a sometimes terrifying tour of the planet's anomalies – from “the missing apeman” to “the Skull of Doom”. **RYAN SHIRLOW** concludes his reappraisal of a fortean television classic.

Hello again, welcome back to the concluding part of our expedition to the *Mysterious World*, ITV's most disturbing tea-time television series of the 1980s. We have a final three episodes before us, presented from his personal archive by Fort-fan and science fiction author Arthur C Clarke.

You may remember that so far we've been able to divide the episodes fairly evenly into two distinct kinds. There have been those of an archaeological or astronomical bent, covering the likes of Stonehenge or the Tunguska event – mysteries that have proven amenable, at least to some extent, to scientific research and explanation.

And there have been the mysteries of a less tangible and more experiential nature, in which ordinary people report extraordinary encounters with sea serpents, lake monsters or the abominable snowman. We've made less progress resolving these since the show was broadcast, and personal reports of sightings continue.

So, what have these last episodes in store for us? Without further delay, pop in your copy of the Network DVD and let's get started.

Episode 11: Dragons, Dinosaurs and Giant Snakes

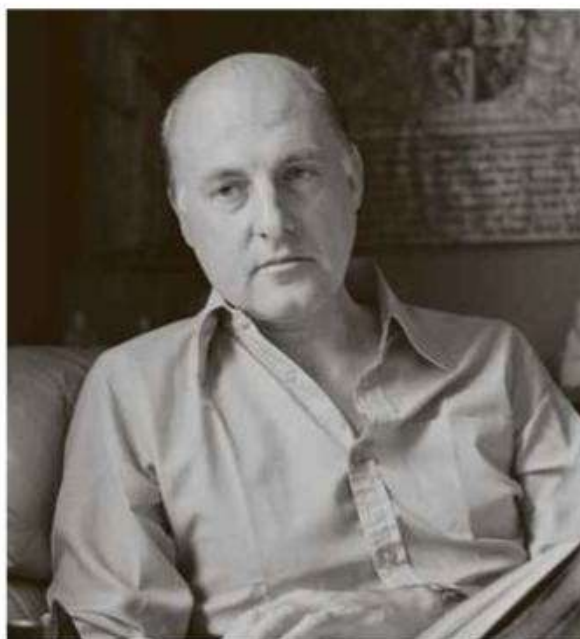
A rather bitty compilation provides a general overview of cryptozoology and of several entities not already covered. Back in 1980, Clarke still believed there was room for a “whole zoo full of unknown animals” across the wilds of Africa and South America and he notes that until quite recently people had refused to believe in mountain gorillas, Komodo dragons or giant pandas.

In New York, Roy Mackal and James



LEFT: Clarke in the opening credits, as his mysterious world hoves into view.
BELOW: Narrator Gordon Honeycombe.

“THE UNIVERSE IS A MACHINE DESIGNED FOR THE ASTONISHMENT OF ASTRONOMERS”



Powell are planning a trip to the Congo to look for relic dinosaurs (see **FT65:10, 86:32-35, 125:66, 145:30-32, 335:21**). It sounds like they have a lovely holiday, but their research is curtailed somewhat by visa issues.

We jump to the last known footage of the Tasmanian Tiger, taken in Hobart Zoo in 1933. Last year, the Smithsonian revealed a further 21 seconds of lost footage had been rediscovered. Despite ongoing sightings and the possibility of survivors holding out in the bush, many Thylacine

experts think the species is probably gone for good (**FT247:22, 290:21, 295:21, 319:19**).¹

Does a photograph taken by a Belgian helicopter pilot show a giant snake at least 40ft (12m) in length? Clarke confirms that no one has claimed the prize initiated by President Theodore Roosevelt for the capture of any serpent over 30ft (9m) long.² Mainstream science has the giant anaconda and reticulated python topping out at close to this length.³

Then we move on to Venezuela and the man-sized De Loys ape, now widely dismissed as a doctored spider monkey (see **FT70:34, 90:42, 107:48, 134:21**). Narrator Gordon Honeycombe asks why anyone would have bothered to fake such a frivolous thing, especially as the members of De Loys's expedition suffered severe sickness and violent attacks that left many of his colleagues dead. We now know the photo likely pre-dates De Loys's ill-fated (and amusingly named) ‘Colon Development’ mission of 1920, and was later seized upon to promote the racist ideals of Swiss anthropologist George Alexis Montandon.⁴

Next, the king cheetah: a partially striped version of the big cat found in southern

Africa. The enterprising Bottriells hired a balloon and succeeded in filming one. It is now accepted to be a recessive local variant.⁵ A hunt for 30-40ft (9-12m) long lizards in New Guinea proves less successful, the largest Papuan monitor lizards reaching only 9ft (2.7m) in length.⁶ And Japanese scientists try to mimic the call of the 12ft (3.7m) tall moa – hoping for a present-day survivor to appear – using artificial noises reconstructed from the shape of the giant bird’s skull. Honeycombe notes that “flocks of their skeletons dominate New Zealand’s museums”. Could they really have survived into modern times? Probably not: they are widely believed to have been extinct for over 500 years.⁷

Finally, we join the hunt for the Siberian Mammoth in Yakutia. A specimen that had been frozen and preserved for 10,000 years is taken to St Petersburg (a city still known as Leningrad in the early 1980s). Soviet scientists have yet to realise their ambition, boasted of here, to grow a living mammoth clone from the preserved bodies.

Episode 12: Strange Skies

Clarke appears, shot in near darkness. “I sometimes think the Universe is a machine,” he tells us, “designed for the perpetual astonishment of astronomers.”

For our first astronomical mystery we visit Lowell Observatory on Mars Hill, in Flagstaff, Arizona. We learn of the intricate canals on the surface of Mars first discovered/imagined by Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli. In 1894 American businessman Percival Lowell and his team made careful drawing after drawing of these canals, diligently mapping out the network of long straight lines and connecting oases, which appeared to grow from the polar icecaps during the Martian summer (see FT56:46, FT328:14).

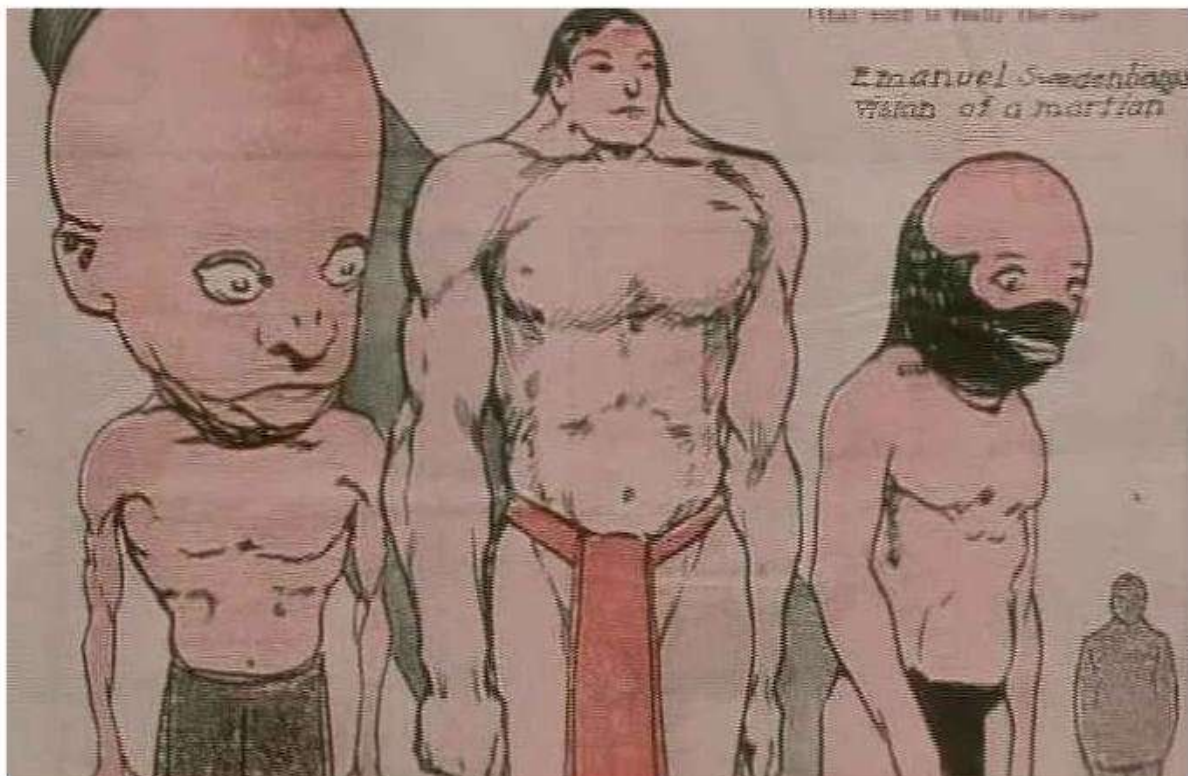
Honeycombe lays out the “grandest and most romantic of theories” – that “the canals were built by Martians”⁸ in a desperate attempt to protect their dying planet from a terminal drought. In the ensuing mania newspapers and even serious astronomical journals engaged in wild speculation over the fate of Mars. Were the Martians trying to communicate with Earth? Was Earth itself likewise doomed?

In 1964, the NASA Mariner probe revealed Mars to be a desolate and lifeless world, finding no trace of the infamous canals. Yet by 1980 the lines were still occasionally glimpsed, with Dr Peter Boyce of the American Astronomical Society telling us that he believes there must be some kind of tangible feature on the surface of the planet.

Clarke gives a group of Sri Lankan school children the task of drawing Mars from a tiny representation placed on a board some distance from their desks. Several of the children reproduce distinct lines and symmetrical patterns not evident in the original drawing in a powerful example of the phenomenon known as pareidolia (see



TOP: Cryptozoologists in the Big Apple, circa 1980: Roy P Mackal and James Powell plan a trip to the Congo from the back of a New York cab. **CENTRE:** De Loys’s infamous (and possibly racist) spider monkey hoax. **ABOVE:** One of the intrepid Bottriells, who filmed a king cheetah from their hired balloon.



TOP: “Serious journals” speculate on the appearance of the canal builders of Mars (with an ordinary human for comparison). **CENTRE:** Dr Richard Stephenson consults the Chinese Imperial records. **ABOVE:** The possible Star of Bethlehem – rendered by fabulously primitive computer graphics.

CLARKE BELIEVES WE WILL RETURN TO THE MOON AND EXPLORE IT MORE THOROUGHLY

FT297:54-55), although Clarke describes it more simply as the tendency for the eye to derive patterns from indistinct blobs.

Next, the illusory planet Vulcan, found by monitoring strange irregularities in the orbit of Mercury. Its discovery was attested to by eminent astronomer Professor Le Verrier and his amateur sidekick Edmond Lescarbault, who was so poor he carved his calculations into wood rather than spend money on paper. Vulcan officially died in 1915 when Albert Einstein updated Newton’s gravitational predictions to accurately match Mercury’s observed movement. Fort describes the whole sorry tale as an “historic fiasco” in his *Book of the Damned*.⁹ Yet Dr Henry C Courten and Prof Don Albert tell the viewer they can still see small objects a few miles across swirling around the Sun. From their position, they believe these may be the remaining fragments of a now destroyed Vulcan. These findings have never been corroborated.¹⁰

We jump back across the Atlantic to Christopher Wren’s library at Trinity College, Cambridge. The 12th century Latin *Chronicle of Gervase* describes a spectacle of fire emerging from a wounded Moon. Apparently, a candidate crater predicted by this historic impact has since been identified, hidden out of sight on the dark side of our celestial partner. Clarke takes it all seriously, believing we will return to the Moon and explore it more thoroughly.

And finally – what exactly was the Star of Bethlehem? Could it have been a real astronomical event? (See FT270:34-39 for this and other suggestions) Dr Richard Stephenson reviews the Chinese Imperial Star Records from 10 BC to AD 10. In five BC, a motionless star was visible for a total of 70 days. Was this a nova rather than a moving comet? This is Clarke’s preferred theory, citing the powerful radio waves still emitted by the star’s remains: pulsar PSR1913+16B. Or was it merely a rare planetary conjunction? Dr David Hughes uses vintage computers to extrapolate back through time, tracking the meeting of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces every 805 years. It’s all somewhat speculative.¹¹

Clarke laments that astrologers flourished in those days, as “unfortunately they still do.” But he rejoices that we can hear the dying voice of that post-nova pulsar, the star that heralded the Christian era. It sounds a lot like a dolphin clicking over the end credits.¹²

Episode 13: Clarke's Cabinet Of Curiosities

Alan Hawkshaw's soaring organ work accompanies a brief recap of the series and a few random stragglers that perhaps didn't fit in elsewhere.

We begin with Death Valley's moving stones (see **FT259:9, 321:14**). Geologist Dwight Carrey takes seven years of careful observation to formulate the theory that wind and rain create the conditions necessary to glide the stones across a thin and slippery layer of mud. He missed one key ingredient: in 2014 scientists were finally able to capture the movements of the stones using time-lapse photography, determining they were the result of a perfect balance of water, wind and ice. ¹³

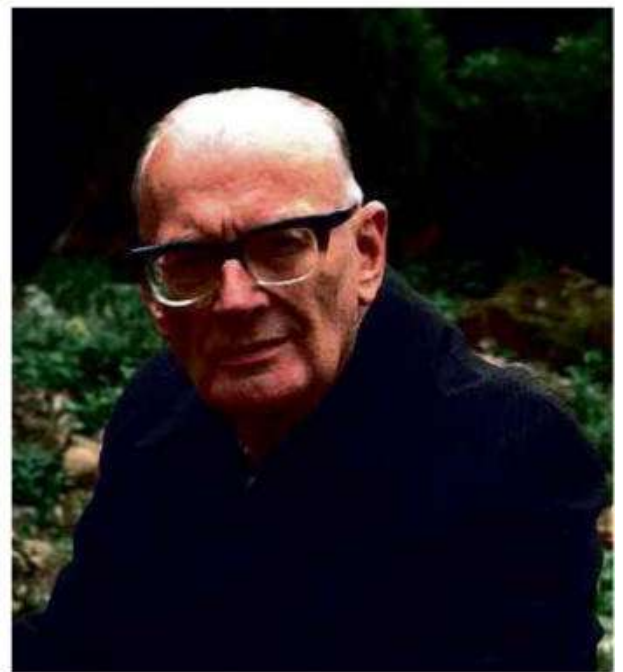
Ball lightning is up next – Clarke's "most important of all mysteries", now almost tweedy with respectability. Various eyewitness and historical accounts are set to some of Hawkshaw's best work yet (he does seem to be more inspired by some topics than others). Professor James Tuck at Los Alamos describes the phenomenon and, following clues from similar fireballs produced by US submarine batteries, manages to produce one artificially. Probably. As he himself admits, an "honest scientist must repeat it over and over." Clarke talks a little about plasmas and their potential to serve our energy needs. *National Geographic* has a useful summary of the current mainstream understanding of ball lightning, the ongoing research and the possible causes, online. ¹⁴

A jarring handbrake turn and it's over to the Minnesota Iceman, recovered from another Siberian ice flow (and discussed in detail in **FT83:34-37** and **343:59-60**). No less an authority than cryptozoological pioneer Bernard Heuvelmans inspected the corpse for three days, and he appears here to say that it represents a genuine recovered body of a Neanderthal. The body disappeared and many claimed Heuvelmans had been duped by a fake. Writing for *Scientific American* in 2017, Darren Naish describes how over the years the face and pose of the Iceman appear to have varied in photographs and descriptions. There may have been more than one model, he suggests, or perhaps the same one was simply defrosted and refrozen over and over again as required. John Napier, a primatologist at the Smithsonian, was convinced it was just a lump of latex. ¹⁵

There are a couple more cases which perhaps should have been included in the earlier Bigfoot episode. Polish POW Wiktor Juszczak encounters a wildman on his escape across Mongolia. It, or something similar, is later killed by the Red Army. "Foremost authority" Myra Shackley believes a population might still survive in the high-altitude areas of the Gobi Desert. Local Mongols call these strange people 'Almas' and trade parcels of their skins. A Russian doctor working in a very remote



TOP: The moving stones of Death Valley – or abandoned artwork for a Pink Floyd album cover? **CENTRE:** Did scientists at Los Alamos manage to recreate ball lightning in the lab? **ABOVE:** The corpse of a tiny mammoth recovered from the Siberian ice.



ABOVE LEFT: A froggy fortean Easter egg at Brighton's Booth Museum of Natural History. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Arthur C Clarke, pondering a further series.

area allegedly met a whole family of these creatures. Definitive proof certainly hasn't been forthcoming (see **FT246:46-52**).

And then we round off the episode, and the series, with a personal favourite: Dr Mike Tyler visits the Cabinet of Curiosities at Brighton's Booth Museum of Natural History (see **FT247:55**), showing us its dodgy 'mermaid' and a mummified toad encased in a rock. Historical reports of frogs trapped in coal, sealed in stone or buried under concrete are recounted. Some emerge alive and even survive for a time after their internment (see **FT29:35, 36:17-19, 39:36-39, 40:7, 45:68, 49:5, 62:22, 103:50, 221:38-42**). Tyler believes this frog might have entered via an aperture and consumed trapped insects until it was impossible to leave. There is however a useful review of the phenomenon in *Forbes*, which highlights that the Brighton toad was in fact donated by the naturalist Charles Dawson, he of Piltdown Man forgery fame (see **FT62:24-30, 347:20**).¹⁶

Conclusion

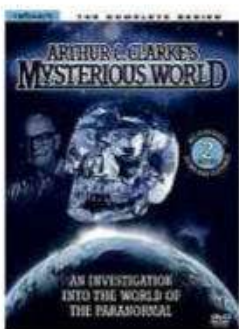
And so it is time to leave behind Clarke's *Mysterious World*, and return to the equally strange one that we inhabit. The years that followed may have been unkind to many of the mysteries presented in the series (some of which needed a bit of fluffing up just to make it onto the small screen in 1980), but our analysis remains intact: that whatever we learn about astronomy or the ancient past, whatever science tells us about the deep sea or our remotest wildernesses, people will continue to personally experience the inexplicable, and their eyewitness testimony will stand as an ongoing affront to our common sense.

One of the backroom researchers on the series was a young Adam Hart-Davies, who would later become familiar to viewers in the UK for helming the popular historical programme *What the Romans Did for Us* and its various spin-offs in the early 2000s. In 1985, he would take over production duties for Clarke's follow-up series, *The World of*

Strange Powers. Under his tenure the focus would shift from the mysteries of space and archaeology to more esoteric examples of forteana, such as poltergeists, telepathy and stigmata (in a now unthinkable teatime gore fest that showcased the spontaneous appearance of the wounds of Christ). Sadly, Gordon Honeycombe would leave the franchise, but he would be replaced by no less a narrator than newsreader Anna Ford, who would bring both suitable gravitas and a much-needed feminine perspective to Clarke's world.

I already have the DVD, which encouragingly sports a picture of spoon-bending Israeli luminary Uri Geller on the back. Should Western civilisation and the walls of Fortean Towers hold up until next year, I will return with a further review.

Until then, I'll leave the closing words to Clarke to offer some reassurance. Even if we solve all of the mysteries in his series, there are plenty more where they came from (and you'll find them each month in the pages of this magazine): "For our universe is not only more mysterious than we imagine, it is more mysterious than we *can* imagine."



If you want to join in, I'd recommend buying the excellent 2008 Network DVD collection, which offers by far the best way to view this classic series. (By the way, you can find a little production Easter Egg if you wind each

episode back to 0, showing how the DVD was digitised from the original footage). Available from <https://networkonair.com/>

NOTES

1 www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/new-footage-benjamin-last-tasmanian-tiger-ever-seen-alive-180975000/

2 The prize has since been withdrawn, unclaimed, to discourage people from disturbing any such beasts: www.nytimes.com

com/2007/09/16/hyregion/thecity/16fyi.html/

3 www.livescience.com/34444-biggest-snake-largest-snake-longest-snake.html

4 www.forbes.com/sites/davidbressan/2016/01/31/de-loys-ape-was-a-well-played-anthropological-fraud/?sh=2c12a0a54d25

5 www.britannica.com/animal/king-cheetah/

6 <https://seaworld.org/animals/facts/reptiles/crocodile-monitor/>

7 www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz/2014/10/24/when-did-the-last-moa-die/

8 We have already seen how Clarke often deploys the term 'romantic' in a dismissive fashion.

9 Charles Fort, *The Complete Books of Charles Fort*, Dover Publications, 2003, p196.

10 For completely illogical reasons it can be difficult to search online for information on the planet Vulcan. There is an overview here: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulcan_\(hypothetical_planet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulcan_(hypothetical_planet))

11 For a summary of the competing theories and a possible debunking of Dr Hughes see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_of_Bethlehem

12 Shades of *Star Trek 4* and aliens speaking the language of whales?

13 www.nationalparks.org/connect/blog/sailing-stones-death-valleya

14 www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/ball-lightning

15 <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/tetrapod-zoology/the-strange-case-of-the-minnesota-iceman/t>

16 www.forbes.com/sites/davidbressan/2015/10/31/the-strange-history-of-the-myth-of-entombed-animals/?sh=769ae7ca3841

With special thanks to Ivan Kirby for the 'Faces of Arthur C Clarke's *Mysterious World*'

➡ **RYAN SHIRLOW** is a Northern Irish fortean, writer and folk musician based in Leeds. You can find him online @ryanshirlow.

EXPERTS & EYEWITNESSES

THE FACES OF ARTHUR C CLARKE'S MYSTERIOUS WORLD



DR. PAUL LEBLOND



P.O. IRA CARPENTER



PROFESSOR FUJIO YASUDA



PAUL BOTTRIELL



MRS. JEAN MELDRUM



PROF. DEREK de SOLLA PRICE



FRANK RIEGER



LEE HANSEN



LORD HUNT



PROFESSOR ROGER JENNISON



FATHER PIERRE BORDET



SON. LDR. LESTER DAVIES



SGT. KEN COOPER



MICHAEL WARD



BOB GIMLIN



DR. JOHN EDWIN WOOD



WILBERT CULLERS JNR.



PROF. GERALD HAWKINS



MRS. EVELYN MURDOCH



GROVER KIGGINS



JOE ALPIN



SGT. BUTCH HOTTINGER



DR. ALEXEI ZOLOTOV



DR. IAN RALSTON



DON WHILLANS



DR. JOHN SIBERT



ALLAN JOBBINS



LAKPA DOMANI



ALADDIN SANE

A decade on from the loony Libyan dictator Colonel Gaddafi's death, **SD TUCKER** rubs his magic lamp and summons the spirit of the Arab world's greatest pantomime villain back from the desert sands...

2021 marks 10 years since the death of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, Libya's infamous "Mad Dog of the Middle East", the most prominent casualty of the Arab Spring. The anniversary will go happily unmarked by most, but to some the Colonel is still something of a cult hero, the hero-worshipping cult in question being The Family International, founded in California in 1968 as Teens for Christ by their self-styled Prophet-leader, David Berg, an exceedingly disturbed individual who viewed modern society as inherently twisted and flawed, filled with fake teachings and false values, malign counter-culture trends which were exactly what allowed his West Coast sect to flourish in the first place. An anti-Semitic prophet of the Apocalypse,¹ Berg warned California would sink into the sea and foresaw the coming of the Antichrist as a necessary prelude to the True Christ's own return to Earth in 1993. Berg – aka King David, Moses, Mo, Father David or simply Grandpa – died in Portugal in 1994, living a life of such secrecy that whenever his photo appeared in Family literature, it was overlaid with pencil-marks disguising him as a humanoid lion. In hiding since 1971, Lion-O's exile from human society was necessitated by claims of sexual abuse made by members of his own Family, both women and children. Showering disciples with thousands of 'Mo Letters' – exegeses of his latest psychic messages from such noted spiritual entities as God, Elvis, Marilyn Monroe, Nixon, Churchill, Merlin, the Sphinx, Audrey Hepburn, the goddess Aphrodite and some kind of sentient snowman – Berg's most notorious idea was 'Flirty Fishing', in which female fans became prostitutes to spread the Word of Berg to their clients at point of orgasm, inspired by Jesus's instruction to his disciples to become "fishers of men". Some 223,989 paying customers were laid in the name of The Lord before the scheme was abandoned in 1987 during the AIDS panic, but the sex-fest continued with Berg's creed of 'Loving Jesus', in which acolytes had to imagine they were actually having sex with the Son of God. Jesus sent holy messages, actively requesting cultists to masturbate over Him. Berg's poems, texts and kids' comic-books advocating such rituals often failed to pass customs posts, being deemed not genuine religious tracts, but niche pornography. Yet one man who had no qualms about being exposed to hardcore



THE COLONEL HAD BEEN CHOSEN BY GOD TO PLAY A SPECIAL ROLE

Jesus-porn was Colonel Gaddafi, who enjoyed nine-hour-long chats with Grandpa during the 1970s, giving consent for a new Family cult compound to be built in Libya. You can see why Berg would think having such a remote desert bolt-hole might prove handy, but what exactly would Gaddafi get out of it? Deification.

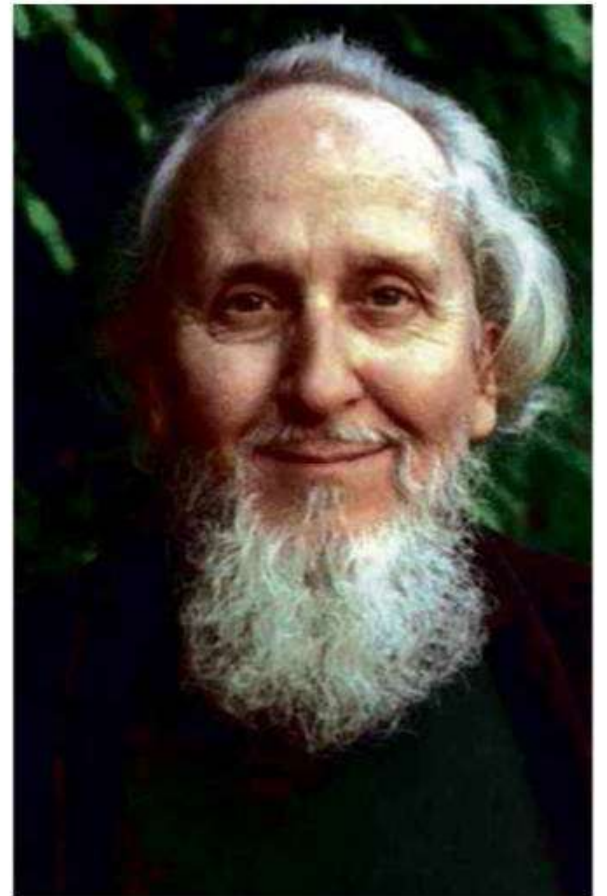
MAD GOD OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Like Gaddafi himself, Berg taught that the Colonel had been chosen by God to play a special role in world history. Unlike Gaddafi, who styled himself as a Mahdi-figure, Berg thought Muammar's role was to be the reincarnation of Aladdin – 'Allah-din' meaning 'Faith of God' – as a prelude to turning into the Antichrist. This was meant as flattery; Gaddafi's future evil role ushering in the apocalyptic global chaos which triggered Jesus's return meant that, paradoxically, this satanic entity only did God's work after all. Berg had long been hearing verbal messages from angels and snowmen about

LEFT: Colonel Gaddafi, flanked by two "Revolutionary Nuns" from his personal bodyguard.

a hitherto unknown individual whose name he ignorantly spelled on paper as 'Godhafi' or 'Godafe', which later proved a sign of The Colonel's divine dyslexic status. In his 1973 pamphlets *Gaddafi's Magic Lamp* and *OIL CRISIS!*, Berg related how, while sitting in an airport reading about global fuel supplies, he suddenly received "one of those supernatural pictures the prophets called visions" so strong it almost made him drop his magazine. This vision was a "magic key"² in the form of an image of "our modern Aladdin, Gaddafi, gleefully rubbing his oil-lamp, which caused it to produce a giant genie, or gigantic demon of darkness of awesome aspect and fearsome power." Berg looked Gaddafi up and found he was "a poor little Arab boy born in a tent" who "did his early studies by the light of an old Arab oil-lamp." Berg recalled the fairy-tale Aladdin had also been a poor boy, steered toward riches and a magic lamp lying in a subterranean cave by an evil wizard. Once Aladdin had carried this wealth to the surface, the wizard treacherously tried to steal it all and bury the boy, a ploy only thwarted by Aladdin accidentally rubbing his lamp and producing a huge genie which saw off the sorcerer and set the young waif up with his own palace, kingdom and beautiful Disney Princess.

To Berg, this *Arabian Nights* legend was really "an ancient prophetic parable" of 1970s geopolitics. Aladdin was Gaddafi, whose underground wealth was the black gold of newly tapped Libyan oil reserves, some of the largest in the region. The evil wizards, or "foreign scientific magicians", were Western oil companies, who would help Gaddafi extract this oil then steal the profits. The lamp he would thus rub, summoning a mighty *djinni* that could never be rebottled, was that of growing post-colonial Arab and African nationalism, which he would unleash against the white wizards by making the Middle Eastern OPEC oil-cartel curtail production until the US and Europe agreed to pay it higher prices for its exports, a petrochemical blackmail that would send oil-dependent First World economies into freefall. In 1965, The Family had received word from God to "turn your eyes towards Memphis [an ancient capital of Egypt] for out



ABOVE LEFT: David Berg's son and daughter meet Gaddafi in 1973. ABOVE RIGHT: Self-styled prophet and cult leader David Berg. BELOW: Berg's 1973 Gaddafi pamphlets.

of it shall come the Great Confusion" – the Apocalypse and its author, the Antichrist. Libya is not Egypt, but Gaddafi had sought an official merging of Tripoli with Cairo (and Syria and Sudan), to which Memphis's modern military leaders initially agreed, before later rethinking; but when Berg was writing it did appear possible that Gaddafi might one day become the new Pharaoh of North Africa, a truly "magic rise to power". When he became Sultan, the fairy-tale Aladdin gained "40 royally attired black and white servants", which Berg linked to the black-majority, white-minority nations of sub-Saharan Africa, who would soon renounce independence and follow Gaddafi as undisputed King of the Continent, together with other militant Black Power radicals in the US, to whose exiled leaders Gaddafi had given shelter as part of his global hobby of State-sponsored terrorism, thus ensuring the looming destruction of "Western Gentile and Jewish capitalism" and the equally godless and oil-addicted Soviet Union alike. The Colonel was now "rubbing his lamp like mad" and wishing fervently to send "the infidel world" of white men "back three or four generations into the horse and buggy days."

Eventually, Europe would become so disillusioned with petro-capitalism it would beg Gaddafi and his non-white hordes to invade and subjugate them. "WHY SEEK YE OIL AT THE HANDS OF THE EVIL AMERICANS IN YOUR NORTH SEA when

there is oil and plenty to spare at the hand of your son [Gaddafi]?" Berg asked Britain, following her 1970s find of offshore oil-fields. "O EUROPE! YEA, O WORLD, WILT THOU LISTEN TO [GADDAFI'S] WONDROUS WORDS OF WOOING WISDOM?" Europe

was Princess Jasmine, kept captive by her despotic Mother America and Father Russia, who needed to be stolen away by her new "boyfriend... this tall, dark and handsome young man" from Libya who was "willing to talk up to Mom and Dad and tell them off!" Europe's only other option was to "MARRY MAO", but Aladdin would rescue her from enslavement in the "distant and aged" leader's harem and install her happily in his own instead. With his new *hour*

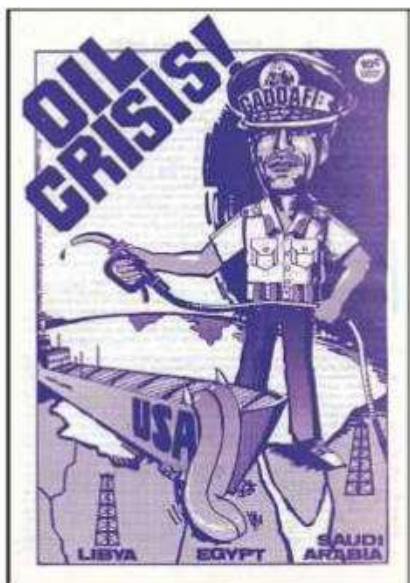
slung over the back of his camel, "Aladdin

[then] becomes ruler of the world!" as "leader of a powerful worldwide Mohammedan Empire!" – the new Mahdi, in fact. "It's heavy!" wrote hippy-friendly Berg, but with "God to help him", this initially benevolent Antichrist, who sought to redistribute his oil wealth through "a love for man and the poor" as part of a new 'Third Universal Theory' of "deistic socialism", was bound to prevail: "Brother, Gaddafi's got it! He could

really go places!" There were only three options for near-future humanity: Shylock's Jew York capitalism, Marx's atheistic Moscow communism, or Gaddafi's godly deistic Arab socialism, doling out petro-dollars to the poor in the name of Allah. "Boy, if I had to choose between the three, I'd take Gaddafi any day!" gushed Berg like a leaky oil-well. One reason for The Family choosing Gaddafi was that he gave them illicit funding, as with the IRA. Another was that the Colonel wrote them a very catchy song.³ Berg saw nothing wrong with pocketing shekels from the Antichrist, as "this is the way many [Biblical] prophets operated... under protection of heathen kings!" But the best reason to embrace Gaddafi's Third Way was that it would lead ultimately to a humanitarian disaster so great that Christ Himself would have no option but to come down from Heaven to fix what Aladdin had broken: "Don't forget, at first God ordains the Anti-Christ to be working with God, but then in the final analysis he's going to fail because he rejects

Christ, and yet it's all part of God's plan!" As Milton had showed, "this is the way Lucifer began, as a servant of God!" before wanting "to be God" instead. Gaddafi would rise by doing good, before the power "goes to his head and he becomes possessed by the Devil and wants all religions wiped out and only complete worship of himself", so triggering "A TERRIBLE MESS!" only Jesus could clear up.⁴

Many of Berg's prophecies





came true. Not only did Gaddafi seize power initially hoping to do some good – before proving, as Lord Acton taught, that “absolute power corrupts absolutely” – he also sought to unite all Africa into his own giant kingdom. In 1999 he urged creation of a ‘United States of Africa’ with a single currency and passport, all under the wise leadership of... well, as with Cæsar upon the Feast of Lupercal, it was not for Muammar to say. “If a neighbouring state wants to invade Libya, I’ll scatter flowers on its way,” he lied, urging others to abolish their border-protecting armies, whereupon he would follow suit, honest. Gaddafi’s billions were key in the 2002 formation of the African Union, the regional EU clone, which he later headed. In 2008 he summoned 200 traditional black African monarchs to ritually crown him Africa’s “King of Kings”. “Africa is my natural place,” he said in 1999, “African Arabs are Africans and Asian Arabs are Asians.” Yet he only said this once other Arab states had rejected his offers of merger, truly thinking black Africans could be easily exploited.⁵ How did a transparent nut like Berg get Gaddafi’s kernel so right? They both shared the same basic psychology. Under Gaddafi, Libya itself became a huge cult-compound devoted to enriching Aladdin, feting him as God on Earth by gifting him an endless supply of under-age sex-slaves, echoing The Family under David Berg’s own dictatorial sway. Like King David, King Muammar’s larger-than-life personality cult thrived upon his charismatic authority. As Berg swooned: “He’s so handsome! – And his eyes! – His eyes are magnetic! They just melt you! Tremendous! It’s really something!” Many of Berg’s own mesmerised sheep probably thought similarly about him.

CRIMINAL IN TENT

When Gaddafi was ousted in 2011, he refused point-blank to accept his fall, going on TV in a golf buggy, holding an umbrella aloft while claiming that any misguided rebels had just had LSD slipped into their Nescafe. Only this very special blend could account for national unrest, he said, as: “My people, they all love me!” How could they not? In 1999, had he not invented the world’s safest car for them? The ‘Libyan Rocket’ came with air-bags, a collapsible bumper and an “inbuilt electronic defence system” to protect passengers. It was rocket-shaped at front and rear, symbolising how in Tripoli weapons of war became tools of peace, offering the final proof that “the Libyan Revolution is built on the happiness of man” and that the Colonel spent his entire existence “thinking of ways to preserve human life all over the world”. He certainly spent a lot of time trying to preserve his own, having endless plastic surgery and dressing in outlandish flowing robes, once gaining an entire photo-spread in *Vanity Fair*. Normal rules did not apply to God. The BBC’s John Simpson recalled

how Muammar would repeatedly fart loudly during interviews (“the thunder would roll for 15 or 20 seconds at a time and then he would sink back into his seat with a pleased expression on his face”), while he refused to stay in a hotel like everyone else at foreign summits, pitching huge bullet-proof Bedouin tents in city-centres, complete with a retinue of camels. Yet still Cæsar feigned to reject his crown, modestly refusing to rise above the oh-so lowly rank of Colonel – by abolishing any other titles above that level. God could do everything, from solving the Israel-Palestine problem simply by rebranding them both ‘Israeltine’, to rewriting the very Bible on account of its “serious mistakes”, like the error that Jesus had died on the cross. Actually, “another man resembling Jesus was crucified in his place”, and Christ did not rise from the dead at all – something Gaddafi had “on good authority” (i.e. his own). Christianity was thus built on a lie, so “all those who do not follow Islam are losers.” In 2008, opening a mosque in Uganda, Gaddafi revealed the Bible must have been “forged” as it didn’t mention the Prophet Muhammad (perhaps because it was written centuries before Muhammad was born). But Gaddafi often rewrote the Koran, too – otherwise some dangerous radicals might say the cocaine-addicted, alcohol-swilling bisexual mass rapist was not truly a pious potential Mahdi at all. In 2009 he hired 100 “attractive, well-dressed women, under the age of 35 and over 1.7m tall” from an Italian hostess agency to attend a two-hour lecture in Rome for 50 Euros each, where he tried to convert them all to his own personal brand of Islam. One actually agreed. Gaddafi also fruitfully bent Gabon’s President Omar Bongo toward Mecca. David Berg would have been proud.⁶

As nobody ever said no to the Caliph domestically, whenever foreigners dared do so, he over-reacted dramatically. He unilaterally declared *jihad* on Switzerland,



ABOVE: The Colonel delivers his 100-minute rant at the United Nations in 2009.

“a world-mafia, and not a State”, after his son Hannibal was arrested there in 2008 for allegedly beating up two hotel workers. The “infidel harlot” nation deserved to be wiped “off the map” by nuclear weapons, raged Hannibal. Gaddafi Sr withdrew billions from his Swiss bank accounts and disrupted bilateral trade on the grounds that any Muslim who did business with it was “an apostate”, ordering that the “masses of Muslims must go to all airports in the Islamic world and prevent any Swiss plane landing, to all harbours and prevent any Swiss ships docking, inspect all shops and markets to stop any Swiss goods being sold,” even Toblerone. He demanded Switzerland be abolished by the United Nations. His 2009 UN General Assembly address was one giant rant. Allotted 15 minutes to speak, Gaddafi fumed for a full 100, his speech being “among the most historic in the history of the world.” Dressed in curtains, the “Leader of the Revolution of the Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, President of the African Union and King of African Kings” threatened to allow free passage to millions of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe in revenge for what white men had once done to them unless the EU gave King Muammar \$777 trillion to hand out to his future subjects in compensation; praised landmines as tools for peace; and complained that UN HQ should be moved from New York to Sirte, as “Libya is a secure country”. Demanding to know who really killed JFK, Martin Luther King, Patrice Lumumba, Dag Hammarskjöld, Jack Ruby and “somebody called Lee Harvey Oswald”, Gaddafi strongly implied it might have been the Jews. Shredding a copy of the UN Charter, he dubbed the Security Council the “Terror Council”, saying Tony Blair should be put on trial for crimes against humanity – his sanest idea ever. Then he revealed swine flu was a bio-weapon created by “capitalist companies” to sell vaccines and that “perhaps tomorrow there will be fish flu” (words now praised online by some as predicting Covid-19). Finally, he instantly solved another long-standing geopolitical problem: “In brief, Kashmir should be an independent State, neither Indian nor Pakistani”, which no one had ever thought of before.⁷

GOD IS DEAD

Gaddafi clearly felt the entire world should literally revolve around him, with other humans existing only in relation to his own person, a form of egotism most darkly expressed in his lifelong hobby of collecting sex-slaves like living Panini stickers. Touring schools, he would pat certain children on the head, indicating they were to be locked in his basement harem, or ‘Aladdin’s Cave’, where they would be force-fed drink and drugs then shown porn so they would know what to do when he “opened” them for himself later.

“Hello, girls!” Tony Blair once waved to them on his way out of the oil-baron’s lair. It’s a good job he didn’t take Cherie along with him, as Gaddafi particularly enjoyed eating up the wives of rival African heads of state as “sex meals” in return for petro-dollars to fund their pet projects. Domestic politicians had to hand over their wives and daughters for free, or simply bend over for him themselves while Aladdin went anal: “Open Sesame.”⁸ He expressed a particular attraction to former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice – or “my darling black African woman ... Leeza, Leeza, Leeza ... I love her very much,” as he once told Al-Jazeera – admiring the dominatrix-like “way she leans back and gives orders to the Arab leaders” who had rejected him. When Rice visited Libya in 2007, he gave her gifts worth \$212,225, including Wonder Woman wristbands and a video of news footage of her overlaid with her very own new love song, *Black Flower in the White House*. His chief procuress, a Toureg woman named Mabrouka Sherif, tried to keep Gaddafi’s girls in check via black magic, in which Aladdin also dabbled, keeping a towel soaked with blood from deflowered virgins for its occult influence. The Colonel posed as a champion of women’s rights, famously having a squadron of Kalashnikov-wielding all-female bodyguards, the ‘Revolutionary Nuns’, but many were just his harem in khaki. Naturally, of all world leaders, Gaddafi got on particularly well with Silvio Berlusconi. When the Arab Spring reached Libya in 2011, Gaddafi handed boxes of Viagra to troops, telling them to “rape, then kill” – but ended up stabbed with a bayonet up the bum before being shot by a jubilant rebel mob on 20 October, the biter bit.⁹

And so the innocent boy-hero turned evil tyrant-wizard was gone, the magical kingdom of Libya was saved, and enjoyed the traditional fairy-tale happy ending... or so NATO leaders airily claimed after bombing Gaddafi’s armies out of it. In reality, the country collapsed into apocalyptic chaos as rival warlords, terrorists, tribal bandits and Russian, Western and Turkish-backed militias fought it out for supremacy – another vision of David Berg’s fulfilled. During his 2011 final stand, Gaddafi allegedly deployed African sorcerers on the battlefield as psychic spies, wearing an ægis-like protective cloak and magic ring made of hyena-bone intended to repel bullets and NATO bombs. When later captured, some of his troops seemed confused, acting as if they’d been hypnotised into fighting by necromancers. Yet once one wicked wizard was slain, he was quickly replaced by another. One leading contender to become Libya’s next Dark Vizier Jafar is General Khalifa Haftar, who purportedly paid a magician \$500,000 for another magic ring with a “servant *djinni*” inside, a “strange bug” which, according to one renegade officer, made Haftar’s underlings “believe everything



ABOVE: Not the Libyan Rocket – Gaddafi would deliver his last televised speech from a golf buggy.

he said” and obey his every word.¹⁰ Never mind Berg’s predicted return of Christ, in Libya Aladdin is already on his Third Coming.

NOTES

1 Even though Berg was himself part-Jewish and adopted titles implying he was the reincarnation of King David or Moses.

2 Citing Matthew 16:19, Berg claimed access to “The Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven” in terms of revelations straight from God.

3 Do as I do/I pray to God/I’m very happy because/I found the road/With Allah, Allah!/You [Westerners] hate negroes/You do not pray/You are no good/You lost your way/Your life is falsehood without/Allah, Allah! (https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/guest-column/story/19781215-colonel-muammar-gaddafi-a-messiah-823193-2014-03-08).

4 *Gaddafi’s Magic Lamp* and *OIL CRISIS!* are online at https://digitallibrary.sdsu.edu/islandora/object/sdsu%3A39719; http://chainthedogma.blogspot.com/2011/02/gaddafi-family-international-and.html; www.exfamily.org/pubs/ml/b4/ml0245.shtml; www.exfamily.org/pubs/ml/b4/ml0246.shtml; www.exfamily.org/pubs/ml/b4/ml0248.shtml. On 14 May 1973 Gaddafi gave a speech – later printed verbatim as an entire paid-for advertising supplement in the London *Times* on 6 June – detailing his ‘Third International Theory’, which claimed to be socialism on an Islamic basis, and thus the will of Allah. “It is the duty of the [religious] State to take from the rich and give to the poor,” said Gaddafi Hood. On this very same day, “by Godly coincidence”, Berg’s cult also began distributing their *Gaddafi’s Magic Lamp* pamphlet on the streets of London, another sign Gaddafi was indeed The Chosen One (at least for a bit). This same pamphlet also found its way into a 1970s OPEC conference to be read and discussed by Arab delegates, something Berg also deemed a divine miracle. To be pedantic here, I should point out that, as the wholly fictional Aladdin never actually existed outside of Scheherazade’s head, Berg’s claim that Gaddafi was his reincarnation makes even less sense than it at first appears to do.

5 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/425929.stm; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/

africa/7588033.stm; www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/26/gaddafi-legacy-meddling-africa.

6 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/440161.stm; www.livescience.com/15726-qadhafi-delusional-dictator-psychology.html; www.smh.com.au/world/the-crazed-compulsions-of-gaddafi-every-bit-the-bond-villain-20111021-1mbfw.html; https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-religion-gaddafi/gaddafi-says-only-islam-a-universal-religion-idUSL3059334720070330; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7311564.stm; www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/16/gaddafi-women-islam-rome.

7 http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1926053,00.html; www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/02/gaddafi-declares-jihad-on-switzerland/341278/; www.theguardian.com/world/2010/feb/25/muammar-gaddafi-libya; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libya%E2%80%93Switzerland_relations; www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/23/gaddafi-un-speech; https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/fbchecks/no-gaddafi-didnt-predict-coronavirus-did-talk-about-viruses-and-vaccines; www.africanews.com/2017/09/19/speech-muammar-gaddafi-at-the-64th-un-general-assembly-in-2009.

8 Yes, I know that’s Ali Baba, not Aladdin, but sesame’s oily seeds were actually used as laxatives, thus lending this joke some genuine medical basis.

9 www.business-standard.com/article/beyond-business/the-dictator-s-playthings-114011001331_1.html; www.salon.com/2013/09/22/muammar_gaddafis_sexual_crimes/; https://millietilly.wordpress.com/tag/mabrouka-sherif-the-brothel-madam/; www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/08/qaddafi-has-long-been-condoleezza-rices-not-so-secret-admirer/338718/; www.thedailybeast.com/condoleezza-rice-met-muammar-gaddafi-exclusive-excerpt-of-no-higher-honor.

10 https://eng.archive.aawsat.com/theaawsat/news-middle-east/colonel-gaddafi-using-african-magic-to-prolong-his-reign-libyan-rebel-officer; https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2019/7/19/libyas-warlord-haftar-uses-black-magic-to-hypnotise-soldiers.

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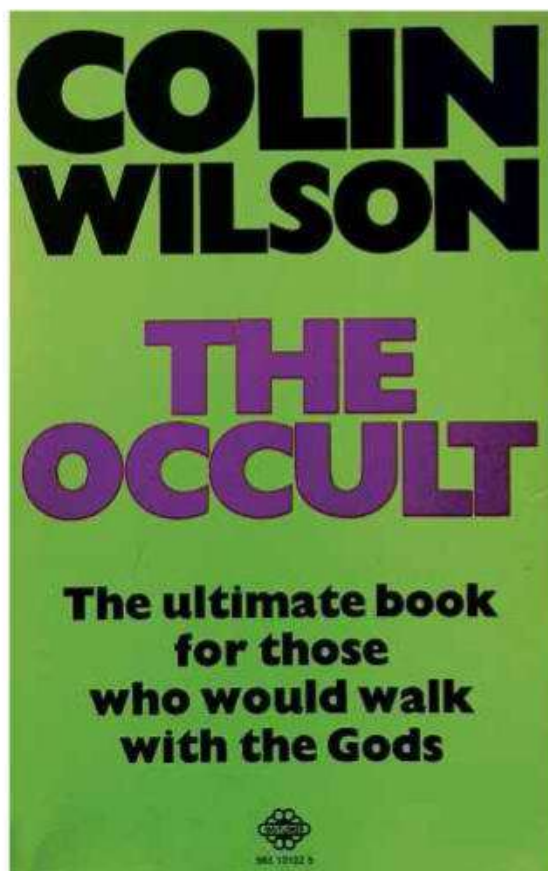
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

NO 62. THE BOOK OF UNHEROIC FAILURES

It's 50 years since Random House first published Colin Wilson's *The Occult: A History*, and it's still in print. Time for a re-assessment, then? Wilson believed himself to be a genius, and notoriously had no qualms about saying as much to all and sundry: some might say that this was proof that he was nothing of the kind. Oscar Wilde at least made his declaration of his own genius as a wisecrack. As for this book, some 700-plus pages heavy, there's also the temptation to echo the Duke of Gloucester on clapping eyes on the first volume of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*: "Another damn'd thick, square book! Always, scribble, scribble, scribble! Eh! Mr. Gibbon?" (History sadly does not record the Duke's reaction when the final, sixth fat volume appeared. Perhaps he was dead by then.) So, one approaches *The Occult* with some wariness, although confident that while it may not be the work of a genius, neither will it be a collection of mere scribbles.

In his preface to the 1979 revised edition, Wilson lets us know precisely where he stands. "Writing *The Occult* made me aware that the paranormal is as real as quantum physics (and, in fact, has a great deal in common with it), and that anyone who refuses to take it into account is simply shutting his eyes to half the Universe." Leaving aside the problematic equation of paranormality and quantum mechanics – a controversy for another time – we're reminded here of a remark (or revelation) that Wilson once vouchsafed to us one drizzly Thursday afternoon in the 1980s: that in writing *The Occult* and its kind-of companion volume, *Mysteries*, he had made the strategic decision to take the claims of the paranormalists *as read* – in other words, he wouldn't burrow critically into any sceptical enquiries, opinions, or research. So, you have been warned.

The body of the book that follows is in three parts: A Survey of the Subject; A History of Magic; and Man's Latent Powers. The first part has three chapters: 'Magic – The Science of the Future'; 'The Dark Side of the Moon'; and 'The Poet as Occultist'. One has to give Wilson top marks for provocation – magic as science, indeed! The downside to such outsticking of the neck is that one has to prove one's case pretty thoroughly. Wilson's case is essentially this, if we understand him: people tend to limit their outlook to the mundane and materially necessary, thus missing most of what the world has to offer – rather as Isaac Newton considered



that he had spent his life diverting himself like a child on the seashore, "now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." Wilson equates the capacity at least to glimpse or, better, apprehend that "ocean of truth", which means being aware of "unseen forces", with the understanding that life has a meaning. (In this respect it's gratifying to note that he's read both Michael Polanyi and Viktor Frankl, both fine philosophers on the subject.) This ability he calls

"Faculty X", which on examination proves to mean anything from psychic abilities to the imagination to visionary experiences to *satori* to a fortunate coincidence: it's so broad a faculty that it becomes a trifle blurred, nebulous rather than numinous. From this comes freedom – presumably of a spiritual and intellectual kind (he never says) – but it is freedom *to* do, think or experience (whatever) rather than freedom *from* anything. So far, so good, but Wilson's view of 'primitive' people is of its time – or even earlier – being naïve and romantic, not to mention somewhat patronising, and it would probably get short shrift from today's anthropologists.

Along the way, in gathering evidence for Faculty X, Wilson whizzes all over the place. No sooner does a thought pop into his head than it clatters out of his typewriter, so it's not exactly difficult to lose the thread of his long-drawn-out argument. (He says in his Introduction that "the book almost seemed to write itself.") Nonetheless, his divagations are all either intriguing or entertaining (often both). They're also sometimes just wrong, as in his discussion of Homer's famous phrase, "the wine-dark sea" (*ἐπὶ οἴνοπα πόντον*). Wilson isn't the first to infer from this that Homer couldn't see the colour blue, or note that archaic Greek didn't have a word for 'blue' – notwithstanding that the sea can also appear green, grey, or nearly black, and we all see things that we can't name. (The last word on the supposed colour-blindness of the ancients should go to the wag who remarked of the ancient Greeks: "Of course they couldn't see blue – history was all in black and white. I'm not falling for lies.") But Wilson, for all his flaunted erudition, seems not to have thought to look into a dictionary of ancient Greek, where a little effort would have shown him that *οἴνοπα* doesn't mean 'wine-dark' – the phrase actually first appears in English prose translations as late as the 1880s – but 'wine-looking' or 'wine-faced'. Scarcely as poetic as 'wine-dark', true, but not that weird if one thinks of light reflecting off the surface of wine poured into an opaque cup – as indeed it does reflect off the surface of the sea. So Wilson is mistaken in thinking that since Homer's time humans have evolved a more precise

sensitivity to colour.

This seems an appropriate moment to point out that, in keeping with many an editorial style book of the time, Wilson always uses ‘man’ – meaning ‘Man’ – to mean humanity at large. The ladies don’t get a look in, even when he’s talking about orgasms, which he does frequently. This may well irritate the present-day reader. All we can say in its defence is that it’s just old-fashioned, and one does get used, or inured, to it.

In any case, Wilson has a questionable view of evolution, of a somewhat Lamarckian turn. He wonders why people everywhere have thick skin on the soles of their feet, and eschews Darwinian adaptation in favour of the human will and wishes: “Is it not more sensible to assume that man wanted thick soles as a matter of general convenience, and influenced his genes to give him thick soles?” (Well, no, it isn’t more sensible, actually.)

Wilson sees that influence as a telepathic one, presumably exerted by thin-soled parents upon the foetus in the womb – or something. A likely story. But it is part of his romantic, and ultimately unprovable, theme that ‘primitive man’ had a greater facility in exercising the powers of Faculty X than modern humans; and it goes along with his lengthy insistence that life, and evolution, are purposeful – and apparently consciously so, deliberately striving ever upward in complexity and cleverness. This is the kind of thing that brings the likes of Richard Dawkins out in hives. Which may be no more than he deserves, but it would drive every other evolutionary biologist crackers too. Wilson insists that a science that “has no place for will and purpose is an obstruction to evolution, and... a dangerous nuisance.” This outlook leads him to say later that: “It is man’s biological destiny to evolve faculty X. All living creatures on the surface of this planet have been trying to do this throughout their history.” Even tardigrades, hornets and fleas?

By now we are in the midst of Part Two, whose chapters are ‘The Evolution of Man’, ‘The Magic of Primitive Man’, ‘Adepts and Initiates’, ‘The World of the Kabbalists’, ‘Adepts and Impostors’, ‘Magic and Romanticism’, ‘The Beast Himself’ and ‘Two Russian Mages’. For Wilson the key issue is that modern man’s consciousness has evolved too fast, and consequently people have forgotten how to galvanise their latent psychic powers. They can be regained through shedding one’s mundane preoccupations – for instance by concentrating on the world *out there*, in its ‘isness’ as Buddhists would say, to achieve a mental calm and clarity of the kind that meditation can bring. It also brings an appreciation of the *value* of the world out there. “And this recognition,” he writes, “leads to a formulation of central importance: ‘occultism’ is not an attempt to draw aside the veil of the unknown, but simply the veil of banality that we call the



“WHAT HE KNEW, HE
KNEW FROM BOOKS,
AND BOOKS LIED,
THEY MADE THINGS
PRETTIER.”

Hanya Yanagihara

present.”

Wilson next embarks on his history of magic among ‘primitive’ peoples, who somehow include the ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians. The chapter is notable for a massive digression, whose relevance is signally unexplained, about Atlantis, World Ice Theory, and other oddities, calling on such choice illywhackers as Immanuel Velikovsky and Edgar Cayce, with digressions-within-digressions about such matters as homosexuality, incest, and Jungian archetypes. This is what happens when a book is allowed to ‘write itself’. Wilson follows this with an alleged discussion of magical ‘adepts’, most of which is taken up with Pythagoras, but then he concludes he was a mystic philosopher rather than a magician. This is all fascinating stuff to be sure, but not exactly to the purpose. The chapter on the Kabbalah veers off into a lengthy denunciation of Christianity (“a disaster”, and “hysterical”, since it led to the demonisation of magic) and a long panegyric on the flying monk, Joseph of Copertino, plus sundry other miracle-working divines, followed by a detour into alchemy, and finally washes up on the shores of Nostradamus. What a long strange trip! Wilson thinks it all proves the “total pointlessness of scepticism”. Not everyone might agree.

The next chapter covers the exploits of Dr John Dee, Immanuel Swedenborg, Franz Mesmer, Giovanni Casanova, the ‘Count’ Cagliostro, and the Comte de St Germain. None of these had any outstanding occult powers, and precious little to do with magic beyond a fascination for alchemy (often as the basis for a confidence trick or two). John Dee comes across as the only truly honest one of the lot. Granted, their stories are fascinating, if often grotesque. The chapter makes a good read. But Wilson ends it thus: “It [the 18th] was a bad century for magicians.” Did we need a 70-page chapter to tell us that?

So we come to the chapter on magic and Romanticism. Wilson starts badly, profoundly misapprehending Romanticism, which he claims is “based on moments of ecstasy” (forgetting, if he ever knew it, Wordsworth’s crucial qualifier, “recollected in tranquillity”) and saying the central fault of the Romantics is that they are “pessimists and defeatists”.. Fortunately he swiftly passes on to give a thorough rundown on 19th-century magicians (mostly *soi-disant*). While we learn many a fascinating fact about people who were more than passing strange, we also have to tolerate his giving that preposterous purveyor of finest hokum, Madame H Blavatsky, the best part of a free pass. Later in the book he does the same, or rather worse, with the cunning fraud who was never caught cheating, Daniel Dunglas Home. Wilson believes the conjuror Home was a genuine medium because of the “overwhelming volume of the evidence”. Said evidence has now been picked apart so thoroughly that Home has been revealed for what he was: a gold-digging fraud.

Meanwhile, there comes the chapter a certain faction of *FT* readers have all been waiting for—not—a *whole chapter* dedicated to the Great Beast, Aleister Crowley. Who comes across as sadistic and narcissistic, a psychopathic fantasist with an emotional age of about five, albeit with phenomenal mental energy and physical stamina. Presumably Wilson intends this 35-page distraction as a fable: how *not* to be a successful occultist. At least he has no illusions about how truly noxious Crowley was.

Next up are accounts of Rasputin and Gurdjieff. Wilson regards the latter as the “greatest magician of the 20th century”, and Rasputin as a “natural thaumaturge” for his remarkable healing powers – which do indeed appear to have been genuine. Wilson spends most of his discussion of Rasputin rescuing the monk from the various lies and calumnies that have accrued to his reputation: it transpires that once he’d got religion he wasn’t even a tenth as debauched as we’d all hoped. Gurdjieff is a trickier item, as his ‘system’ was so complex, and he himself was clearly a brilliant psychologist. Essentially it was designed to prise the mind from its habitual dozy lack of awareness

through hard physical work, strenuous, intricate dancing, and demanding mental exercises so that one becomes fully alert and awake, engaging with the world through several layers of consciousness – and making oneself open, in Wilson’s terms, to Faculty X. And some of Gurdjieff’s pupils – or disciples – were able (as was he) to communicate telepathically. Although intriguing, the treatment here is inevitably superficial, as Wilson implicitly admits.

The third part of the book consists first of Wilson’s lengthy treatment of witchcraft, werewolves, and vampires. This is mostly a history, with various anthropological and psychological diversions, often involving grisly murders, usually with a sexual component; and ‘explanations’. One of the weirdest of these is his exegesis of the witch-hunts and trials: “Why did all this happen after the Reformation?” he wonders. Because previously the Middle Ages had not “evolved” *freedom of imagination* (his italics). “Man,” he intones (as if what happened in Europe was somehow a global event), “plodded about his daily tasks, and did not see very far beyond

them.” Of *course*: no soaring cathedrals, no Dante or Chaucer, or Gawain and his Green Knight, no mummers, mystery plays, music or folk poetry – people were blind and deaf to all that. Really one’s teeth do grind at this kind of thing. And apart from that, one does wonder what it all has to do with the occult; and Wilson doesn’t really tell us.

Then we enter the world of spirits. Once more we have a potted history, with a large chunk taken up with DD Home (see above). Wilson notes something others have remarked on: the sheer triviality of the messages ‘from the other side’, and the banality of ‘phenomena’ such as floating trumpets, invisible harmonicas – even tipping tables – in the séance room. He suggests that if this stuff is coming from the medium’s subconscious, then *ipso facto* it *would* be pretty trivial. A fair point. The chapter has a strange trajectory: from the séance room through Ted Serios’s ‘thoughtographs’ to reincarnation to ‘psychic surgery’, finally landing up with some thoughts on flying saucers and alien intelligences. Faculty X doesn’t get much of a look-in in these later sections.

Wilson ends his hefty book with ‘Glimpses’, a peroration that may be confused or, more kindly, whose inner logic isn’t fully articulated. (Wilson could probably better explain this in conversation.) He begins with various theories (such as Wilhelm Reich’s) of a vital force at work in the Universe, then moves on to JW Dunne’s and JB Priestley’s ponderings of time, and from there to numerous examples of sudden enlightenment (*satori*), a leap out of what he thinks is our everyday somnambulant state. The relationship is not obvious. What does become clear is the point Wilson has been repeating all along: to prolong such enlightenment is an extension of ordinary human powers. And Wilson thinks that this is a matter of human evolution – and evolution can be directed by the mind. This quirky perspective is why *The Occult* belongs on every fortune teller’s bookshelf. It could have been a third its length, but Wilson is a fine storyteller, and this book is full of great stories. Fun for all.

Colin Wilson, *The Occult*, Random House 1971; Grafton 1979; Watkins 2015.

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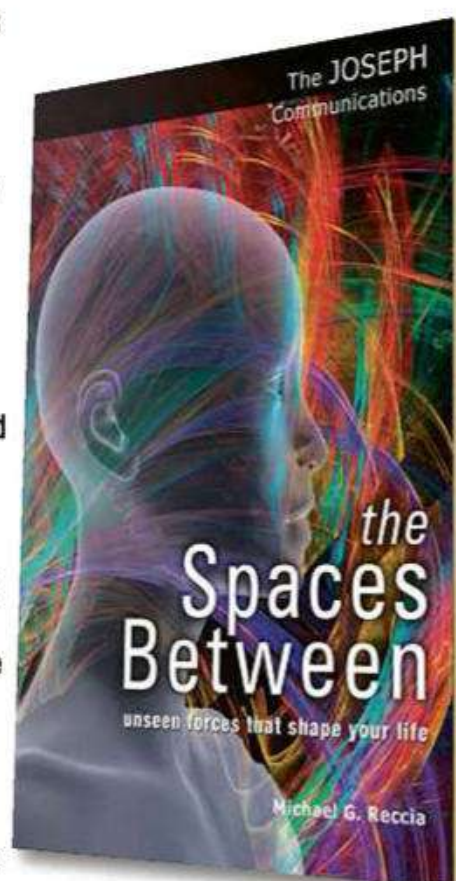
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Ghost trees of the Far East

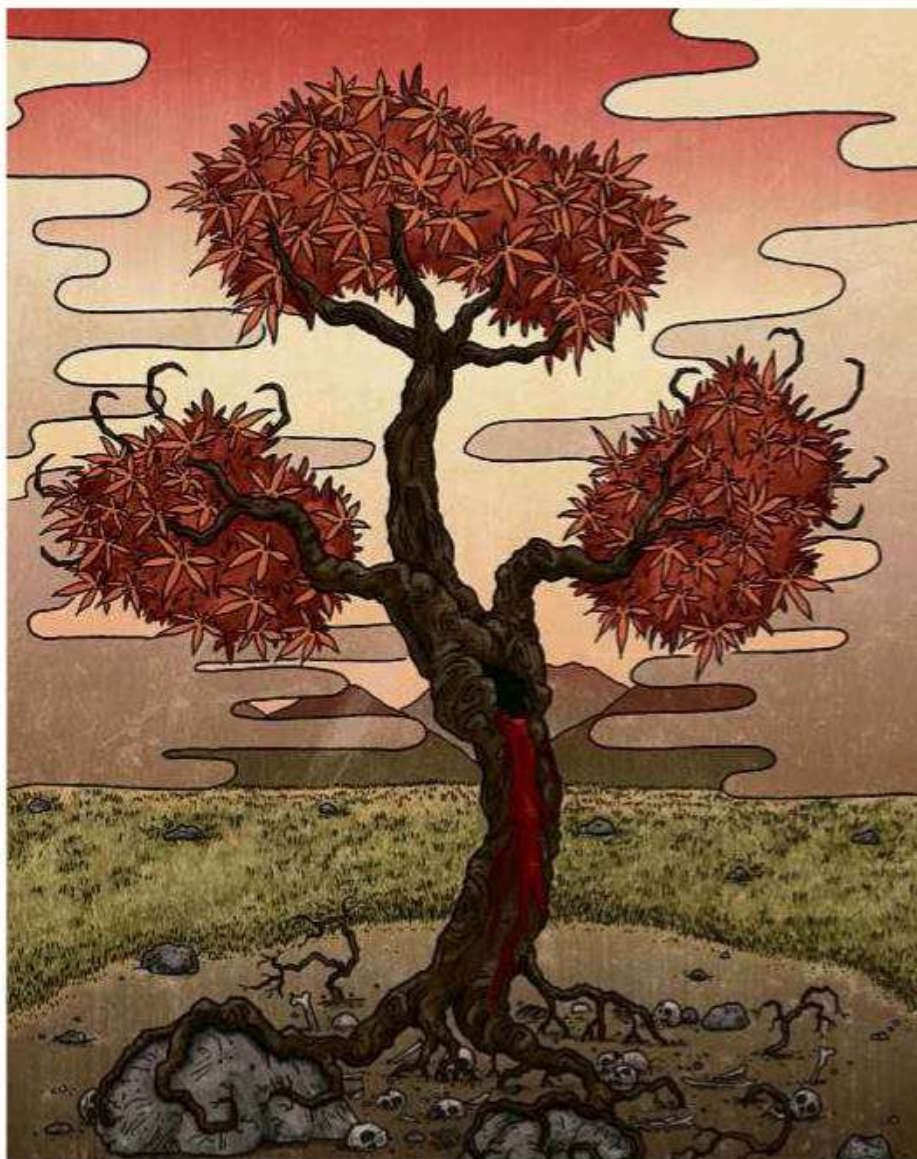
RICHARD FREEMAN looks at arboreal horrors from Japan and beyond

Trees dominate many landscapes. It was said that at one time the forests of Britain were so vast that a squirrel could travel from Land's End to John O' Groats without putting a paw on the ground. Today there are vast swathes of rainforest in Africa, Asia and South America that are still unexplored.

Trees loom large in the World's mythology. The Norse Yggdrasil or World Ash has its roots in the underworld, where they are gnawed by a great dragon. Its branches support Asgard, realm of the gods. In Arabic lore certain trees are haunted by djinn. If sacrifices are made to them they will help the sick who sleep beneath them by giving them prescriptions for cures in their dreams. The Egyptian *Book of the Dead* mentions sycamores as part of the scenery of the afterlife. Given their universal presence in landscape and lore, is it any wonder that there are ghost trees?

Trust Japan to have the weirdest one of all – a vampire tree! A *Jubokko* is created when a tree grows amid the carnage of a battlefield. Its roots suck up the spilt blood and, nourished by death, they develop an unnatural thirst. A *Jubokko* looks like a normal tree until an unsuspecting human comes within its reach. Then the tree's branches whip out to seize the poor victim, hoisting them up and draining every drop of blood from their body.

There are a number of monster trees in Japanese lore. It was believed that once a tree became more than 1,000 years old, it became a spirit tree and gained sentience. One story tells of a woodcutter named Musabi no Gen who went up to a mountain



forest to fell a tree. He found a huge, gnarled old specimen and was about to hew it with his axe when he heard a voice warning him that the tree was about to fall. Startled, he looked around, but saw no one. He was about to swing his axe again when he heard the sound of a tree crashing down. He leapt back from the trunk, but no tree fell. Each time he attempted to cut the tree, the loud crashing noise stopped him. Finally, at nightfall, the tree underwent an horrific transformation. A twisted mouth formed in the trunk and evil looking eyes opened in the knots in the bark. It uprooted itself and began to glow a lurid blue. Its eerily luminescent branches snatched up the hapless woodcutter and enveloped him.

In Gifu Prefecture, central Japan, there is an old persimmon that is believed to grow human hair. The tree grows in a graveyard on the grounds of the Fukugenji

Temple in the town of Yoro. The temple is now abandoned, and with good reason. At night the tree is said to glow a weird blue. Its branches sprout hairs that if set alight smell like burning human hair. Removing this hair brings bad luck. Several decades ago, two youths from the town cut some of the hair from the tree. One developed a fever and died and the other had a fatal accident. Both were dead within a month of defiling the tree. In 1978 a group of hikers picked fruit from the tree: they too met with a bad accident.

It is said that in 1681 the father of a man named Ishii Mitsuno-jo was murdered by Akabori Gengoemon in Osaka. Ishii Mitsuno-jo, a 26-year-old samurai pursued his father's killer in order to take revenge. However, he too was killed by Akabori, who strangled the samurai and hid the body under a persimmon tree

before fleeing. Some 29 years later, two brothers of Ishii Mitsuno-jo named Genzo and Hanzo caught up with Akabori and killed him. The tree beneath which Ishii Mitsuno-jo was buried began to grow hair. Eventually, the tree died and fell over, but a new one grew in its place and this too sprouted hair and glowed blue at night.

In 1971 a professor at Tokyo Agricultural University examined the hair and said that it was actually the fibres of a plant that resembled human hair. What came first, the odd plant, with a legend growing up to explain it, or the legend, supported by the growth of a hair-like plant?

In 2008 a witness called 'John T', a Filipino man living in the US, visited his aunt back in his homeland and got a summer job encoding medical records. One night, unable to sleep, he drove up to his workplace to retrieve an iPad. On the way home he saw what he thought was a horse crossing the road in front of him. But as he drew closer his headlight illuminated something truly bizarre – a tree moving with a wobbling motion: "When I got around 15 yards from it, I saw that it had long flowing leaves that reflected moonlight, like it was glowing. Its branches were willowy, but smooth, like a snake, and moved slowly. Its trunk was narrow like a human waist and bent in sharp angles, but had a reddish hue to it. I stopped a little closer to it and saw that it seemed to move on its roots... When it reached the other side of the road, it slowly sank into the dirt. When it was almost halfway into the ground, it slowly faded into the shadows."

The idea of a ghost tree may sound odd, but with the vast number of trees destroyed every day by humans around the world the real question might not be "Why ghost trees?" but "Why aren't there more of them?"

♦ RICHARD FREEMAN is an author and the zoological director of the Centre for Fortean Zoology.

“My dad saw Shuck in the Seventies”

A magical hell hound or just a big black dog? **MATT SALUSBURY** shares some vintage Black Shuck sightings from Suffolk in the 1970s.

I investigate reports of big cats in Suffolk; I’ve received over 100 of these over the past seven years. But while seeking testimony concerning Suffolk big cat sightings, a surprising number of unsolicited accounts of encounters with the phantom East Anglian hellhound called “Black Shuck” seem to come my way. Shuck can’t possibly exist, of course. Nonetheless, I still receive accounts of his antics in the Suffolk countryside. An interesting and surprisingly consistent pattern in this handful of Shuck reports is that most of them describe encounters from 40 years ago, usually reported by sons keen to tell me how “my dad saw Shuck in the Seventies.”

During Shuck’s long history, the two peaks in his reported East Anglian activity occurred in the 1920s and in the 1970s: and during this latter cool, fab and groovy decade, the ancient horror that was East Anglia’s Black Shuck was most often at large, scaring the residents of Suffolk as never before.

Ivan AW Bunn’s excellent contemporary analysis of East of England Shuck traditions, “Shuckland: Analyzing the Hell out of the Beast” (<https://www.hiddeneia.com/shuckland/analysing1.htm>) remains unequalled to this day. Among the many 1970s Shuck experiences that came to Bunn’s attention was one via a letter from 1973, in which a Lincolnshire man with no previous knowledge of East Anglian black dog traditions told how he was laying drainage pipes across the marshes behind the



TONY LILLEY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

massive Holy Trinity Church at Blythburgh (so huge it’s known as “the Cathedral of the Marshes”). Suddenly, he heard a dog loudly panting behind him. He turned round and there was... nothing. It was only when he told some locals in the pub that they produced a book of local Shuck stories.

Although Bunn’s researches were turning up “hitherto unrecorded characteristics” in Seventies Shuck sightings, he observed at the time that 1970s reports don’t mention the more spectacular aspects that Shuck displayed in earlier times. Seventies Shuck tended not to be headless, not to have one eye in the centre of its head, not to have horns, not to wear chains, not to resemble a calf or grow in size or shape-shift or foretell deaths or explode. He didn’t even seem to walk in step with witnesses that much.

Even Shuck’s red eyes were seldom mentioned anymore. He was increasingly just a strange, rather big dog that appeared out of nowhere. He still did his

Shuck’s magical powers seem to have been shaved away over time

vanishing act, although witnesses just reported not being able to work out where he could have gone. Modern Shuck witnesses were left wondering whether they’d in fact seen a huge, black – but otherwise ordinary – dog.

They came thick and fast, the Seventies Shuck sightings, particularly around Lowestoft, Suffolk’s next biggest town after Ipswich, where Shuck chronicler Ivan Bunn is still based. A woman spotted Black Shuck in the bushes at Lowestoft’s Belle Vue Park in 1975, although her husband saw nothing. Folklorist Theodora Brown claims to have had an encounter of her own with the Black Dog in the churchyard of St Mary’s, Bungay, in the 1970s. A Mrs Whitehead

saw a death-portending Shuck in the streets of Bungay at the moment her mother died, while Police Constable Jenkins had several Seventies Shuck experiences around the A12 road at Blythburgh. Peter Jennings’s *Haunted Suffolk* records an early Seventies sighting of a large *white* dog seen by a woman walking in Beccles cemetery. The dog faded away as she approached. Keith Flory contacted Ivan Bunn’s *Hidden East Anglia* team to tell them about the night in 1973 when, motorbiking home from Woodbridge, he was followed by a Great Dane-sized Black Shuck who bounded after his motorcycle all the way down the town’s Old Barrack Road – effortlessly keeping up with him all the way, until Flory finally lost his pursuer in Seckford Hall Road.

Some 40 years later, a few of my Suffolk Shuck informants said they’d never before communicated to anybody else what their fathers had related to them in the Shuck department; one informant felt they could only tell me because their father

had since passed away. Some informants expressed regret at not having pressed their dear departed dads for more information about their Shuck sightings. It's as if there's a complicated Shuck-experience dynamic in father-and-son relationships in the county of Suffolk.

The other pattern that emerges from these testimonies of Seventies Suffolk Shuck sightings is more the absence of a pattern – they are all very, very different. While Shuck's magical powers seem to have been gradually shaved away over time, the sheer variety of encounters has, if anything, increased.

A man from Rattlesden told me that his father, back in the 1970s, was driving on the A140 from Ipswich to Stowmarket one night when he collided with Black Shuck in the dark. He got out of the car to take a look and found... nothing. The next day there was a strange deposit on the bonnet of his car, "like eggshells." Another bizarre encounter narrative came from a man identifying himself as "Major Pickle" on Twitter. He disclosed that his father (eventually) told him that on 5 August 1973, he (Major Pickle's father) and a friend were driving from the small, mostly agricultural village of Henstead, west of the A12, to the coast at Bawdsey to go canoeing. Coming round a corner on the road near Henstead, the canoeists saw a huge black dog with something like a mane, standing in the road and just looking at them. It "seemed to be there and was just gone," according to Pickle's account. When his dad got out of the car for a look, there was nothing to see except (then) open fields. It was what happened next that made those two 1970s canoe enthusiasts think they'd had a brush with a beast of ill omen. The friend with whom my informant's dad went canoeing always mapped and researched their canoeing routes. They'd been canoeing off the coast at Bawdsey many times before, but "they never encountered anything like this". Their canoe went into a "freak tidal whirlpool", they capsized and were almost drowned. They



TOP: Blythburgh's Holy Trinity Church has seen a number of Shuck sightings.

were washed up on the Ministry of Defence's Bawdsey Island Radar Station, "an interesting experience during the Cold War". Their inadvertent trespassing in a then restricted defence installation meant they kept quiet about the events of that day. Major Pickle said of his dad's encounter: "To the day he died, he was convinced it was Shuck and the story never changed in any way." Could it have been a big cat? Dad insisted it was a really big dog.

Jim Bradley, a Norfolk birdwatcher, contacted me to tell me how "my friend's father who I would say is now in his 60s," encountered the Black Dog himself "in Orford in the late 70s... He and a friend were out walking and a black dog, calf-sized, wandered onto the track and stared at them. It eventually lumbered off into the scrub. They followed its path but the beast had seemingly disappeared, no trace whatsoever."

This wave of Seventies Suffolk Shuck sightings may have been Shuck's last hurrah – after that, reports of Shuck encounters tailed off. The few Shucks that have manifested in Suffolk since then seem to have lost many of their supernatural powers. Christopher Reeve, co-author of *Shock! The Black Dog of Bungay*, told me that by 2014 he couldn't find any adults who could give him new accounts of Shuck experiences. Small children still seem to see Shuck locally, or at

least have no inhibitions about relating other people's sightings.

While "my dad (or my dad's best mate) saw Shuck in the Seventies" accounts emerging over 40 years later are still surprisingly common, accounts of more recent Suffolk shuck experiences are rare. From Rendlesham Forest comes a 1980s story of an encounter by Paul and Jane Jennings "on a cold winter's afternoon in 1983", as related by ufologist Nick Redfern in his article "Weirdness in the Woods". (<http://monsterusa.blogspot.co.uk/2009/03/weirdness-in-the-woods.html>.) They encountered a big black dog on the forest path. Jane said the beast's head "was clearly canine in appearance... much larger than that of any normal dog. Yet... its body seemed to exhibit characteristics that were distinctly feline." It had an "eerily mournful expression upon its face... Suddenly, the beast began to 'flicker on and off for four or five times', then finally vanished", leaving a strange metallic smell.

A post on the Centre for Fortean Zoology's blog from "Woody" told how he and his dog Max had a 1994 Shuck encounter on one of their regular runs around "Martlesham Creek... by the river Deben, that runs to nearby Woodbridge." It was there that Woody became "aware of being watched... checking behind me, about 50 yards back stood a huge black dog... my own wouldn't take his eyes off it. It

stood stock still, watching us... [I] put my dog on a lead and walked out of sight of it." Max turned again and growled. "There stood the big black dog again... I began to worry a bit." There followed three or four more sightings of the same dog, always the same distance away, always with the same stance, and "with me very nervously looking over my shoulder until we got level with Martlesham Church, when Max turned, growled and practically broke the lead in his eagerness for a fight, only... there was nothing there!" Woody and Max then "ran like hell the remaining mile... home and locked the doors." Woody admitted "the dog I saw may just have been someone's... be it a bloody big one."

One of my unsolicited Shuck informants told me a story of "a guy" out near Coddham, north of Ipswich, who in the early 2010s took his dog for a walk on a windy, rainy day when they were apparently chased by a big dog; as soon as it got nearer to them it would vanish and the process started again.

Twenty-first century Shuck witnesses often concede it could have been an ordinary dog they saw. When a "shaken driver" reported his encounter with "a white wolf stalking the back roads of Suffolk" in 2009, he believed he'd seen an escaped exotic animal rather than a Suffolk Shuck phantom. Nigel Stebbing, who was able to photograph the "white wolf" from his van at Kersey, near Hadleigh, didn't think he'd seen a phantom hellhound. (There's a tradition of a White Shuck around Woodbridge and a ghostly "White Dawg" in Lowestoft, though.) By 1998, a couple from Bungay visiting Suffolk's Dunwich Forest who heard panting or growling no longer assumed – as did our pipe-laying Lincolnshire man back in the 1970s – that it was Black Shuck. They were instead convinced they'd heard an Alien Big Cat.

♦♦ MATT SALUSBURY is Chair of the National Union of Journalists London Freelance Branch, Chair of the trustees of Dunwich Museum and a regular *Fortean Times* contributor.

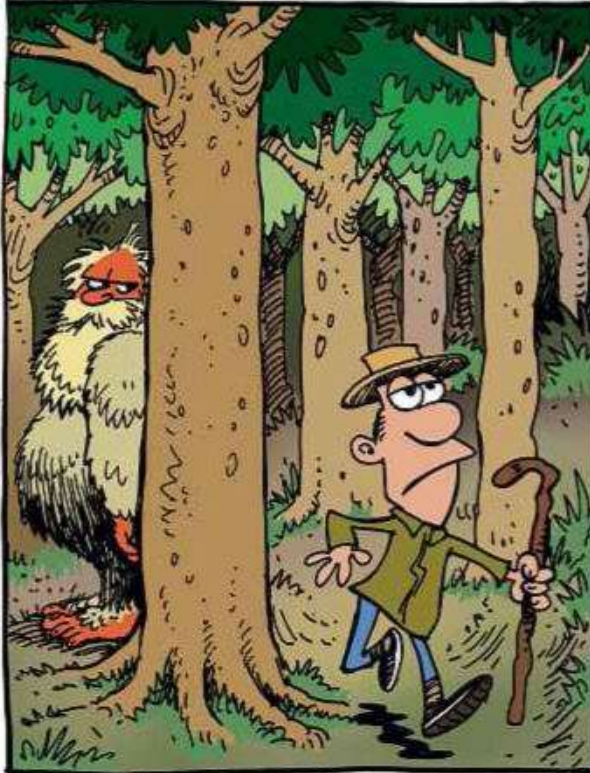
PHENOMENOMIX

SASQUATCH! YETI! BIGFOOT! GRANG PENDEK! THE WILD MAN OF THE WOODS!! HE HAS MANY NAMES...



SASQUATCH

THESE ENIGMATIC CREATURES EXIST ALONGSIDE HUMANITY HIDDEN IN THE DEEP WOODS...



HUNT EMERSON

SOMETIMES TAKEN FOR THE SPIRIT OF THE FOREST ITSELF!



SOMETIMES BELIEVED TO BE A WILD, PRIMITIVE MAN-THING, CASTING ITS SHADOW OVER INNOCENT WOODLAND PICNICS!



MOSTLY FELT AS A MYSTERIOUS BUT UNSEEN PRESENCE IN THE TREES...



...BUT OCCASIONALLY AND ACCIDENTALLY SPOTTED BY STARTLED CITIZENS!



SOMETIMES SIGNS OF THEIR PASSING ARE FOUND BY THOSE WHO LOOK CLOSELY...



MANY PEOPLE DENY THE FOREST FOLK EXIST AT ALL...



THE FOREST FOLK KNOW WHERE THOSE PEOPLE LIVE, AND WILL BE ROUND FOR BREAKFAST ONE OF THESE DAYS...





Blake's heaven

Ian Simmons discovers in a wider social context what it meant to be the visionary William Blake while **David V Barrett** explores the political and religious background behind his personal mythology

William Blake vs The World

John Higgs

Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2021

Hb, 390pp, £20, ISBN 9781474614351

Divine Images

The Life and Work of William Blake

Jason Whittaker

Reaktion Books 2021

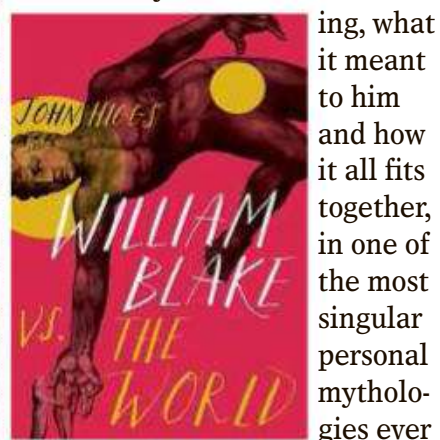
Hb, 392pp, £25, ISBN 9781789142877

In the nearly two centuries since his death, William Blake has gone from being an obscure artist, widely deemed “mad”, to a cultural icon, albeit an oft misunderstood one. This is not entirely surprising; in both his poetry and his art, Blake’s imagery is highly personal and inaccessible, so that his first biographer, Alexander Gilchrist, concluded that Blake was making no effort to be comprehensible as it made his work easier and more fun to do.

Subsequent biographers have likewise struggled to catch the essence of the man and even today academic research into Blake’s work has not unravelled all its mysteries. John Higgs, though, is less concerned with the biographical detail and more with what it meant to *be* William Blake, nearly 200 years ago, and how his distinctive works emerged from his unique nature and the milieu in which he found himself. He is well positioned to tackle this considerable task, having written books on other visionary creatives such as the KLF and Timothy Leary, and been a close associate of others such as psychedelic pioneer Brian Barritt and FT’s own late, great, Steve Moore. As a result, he is not daunted by the prospect of tackling Blake’s personal

universe head on.

Drawing on up-to-date psychological research, Higgs grasps the essence of Blake and makes it as comprehensible as it is ever likely to be for a non-specialist audience. He grounds this exploration by placing Blake in his neuroscientific context, making it clear that he was a rare individual who can see a permanent visionary world that is as real to him as the physical world is to us. Grasping that Blake was existing in a different state of consciousness from most other people allows Higgs to take the journey into Blake’s inner world. He draws threads from history, comparative religion, cultural studies, the counterculture and even quantum physics to elucidate exactly what Blake was seeing, what it meant to him and how it all fits together, in one of the most singular personal mythologies ever created. Reading this, I got a sense for the first time of how Blake’s poetry and pictures mesh and what the mystical underpinnings of all this are.



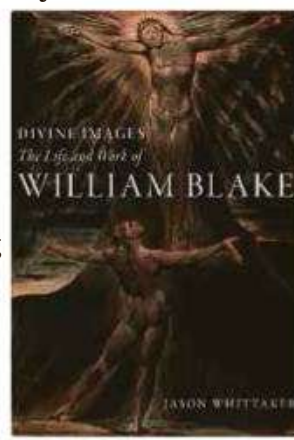
Blake has been claimed by everyone from psychedelic voyagers to English nationalists and Higgs is insightful as to why so many people today find him powerful and relevant while he still transcends any box they might try to put him in. I have read many books about Blake over the years, but this feels like the only one that remotely bottles the magic; with this book Higgs has reached a completely new level.

Blake was existing in a different state of consciousness from most other people

In his gorgeously illustrated biography of William Blake, Jason Whittaker also explores the poet and artist’s personal mythology.

Blake’s religious ideas were controversial from very early on; one of his first illustrated books was *All Religions Are One*: they all stem from the human imagination, “each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call’d the Spirit of Prophecy”. He was opposed to the prevailing belief of the time, deism, that a supreme being set creation going, then had no further involvement in it; he rejected the concept of a God out there, but believed that God is “revealed entirely within and through man”, through our experience of mercy, peace, pity and love.

He also rejected dualism, the two opposed principles of body and soul, especially the idea that “Energy, called Evil, is alone from the Body & that Reason, called Good, is alone from the Soul”; instead, “Energy is the only life... Energy is Eternal Delight” – hence his enlightened and liberated views on sexual-



ity. (Whittaker reminds us that Blake had illustrated Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Original Stories from Real Life* and was greatly influenced by her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, particularly in his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*.)

In Blake’s complex personal mythology, Urizen is effectively both the domineering Old Testament God and Satan, “the forces of convention and tradition”, while Orc is “the spirit of revolution”. Whittaker sees Blake’s beliefs stemming originally from the French and American Revolutions; his mythology is “an imaginative recreation of the political events of his day that will chart the difficult task of undoing millennia of falsehood and repression”.

Oddly, for a biography focusing partly on where Blake’s spiritual ideas came from, Whittaker spends almost no time on the teachings of the Moravian Church that Blake’s mother attended, dismissively saying that you could be a member of both the Moravians and the Church of England, so Blake was really an Anglican. So whence his radical theology?

It’s incomprehensible that he only cites Marsha Keith Schuchard’s groundbreaking study of Blake’s spiritual and sexual beliefs, *Why Mrs Blake Cried: William Blake and the Erotic Imagination*, briefly in one footnote; it’s not even listed in the bibliography. He spends a little more time on Swedenborg, but again doesn’t really explore how his teachings also affected Blake. His concentration on political rather than religious influences on Blake’s unique mythology seems a blind spot.

Higgs ★★★★★
Whittaker ★★★★★

The classical werewolf

Gail-Nina Anderson finds that lycanthropy isn't only found in northern countries

The Werewolf in the Ancient World

Daniel Ogden

Oxford University Press 2021

Hb, 280pp, £25, ISBN 9780198854319

Daniel Ogden has established himself as the go-to academic for scholarly, text-based surveys of supernatural motifs in the Ancient World, into which context this book fits admirably. His knowledge of the source material (and the vast body of modern literature discussing it) is dazzling, united here with a willingness to consider related motifs from mediæval and later writers to expand his structural analysis of the classical references. I can't imagine a more thorough treatment of his theme, but it rapidly emerges that there isn't a superabundance of original material to draw on, and much of what exists is fragmentary, obscure and subject to the ambiguous nuances of translation.

In a world where the gods could transform both themselves and mortals into anything from a bull to a stream, a belief in shape-shifting from human to wolf hardly seems unlikely, though I had previously thought of it more as a northern, not to say Nordic, concept.

None of the great Olympian myths, however, deals with lycanthropy, while (despite the linguistic resonance of his name) the keynote story of the Arcadian King Lykaon being turned into a wolf as punishment for feeding human flesh to Zeus raises the knotty issue of whether a one-off change from human to animal is quite the same as the shifting, liminal status of the werewolf of folklore.

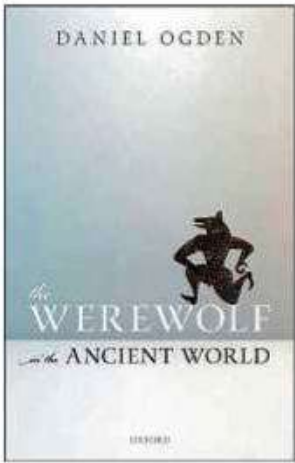
Indeed, alongside a thorough discussion of this Olympian narrative, Ogden persuasively argues that other literary sources suggest the classical werewolf to have been a creature of superstition and oral tradition, related less to deities than to the witches and sorcerers of folklore and popular imagination. Far from being a myth of the gods, the overtly sensationalist werewolf story from Petronius's *Satyricon* emerges as a tall after-dinner tale where magic informs a bawdy low-life world of slaves, inn-keepers and adulterers. Comparison with the *Metamorphoses* ("The Golden Ass") of Apuleius confirms that the Romans at least had a taste for robust satirical comic fiction which happily accommodated human-into-animal motifs, albeit in this instance ass rather than wolf.

At the other chronological end of Ogden's range of texts we are offered the tempting possibility of werewolves in the *Odyssey* – does Circe transform hapless sailors into wolf-men and

lion-men as well as pigs? Some vase-paintings suggest this interpretation, but the book offers no illustrations beyond a single line drawing of an isolated figure and, rather unnecessarily, a photograph of a wolf. By contrast it provides, as one

would expect, full apparatus of index, bibliography and (many, many) footnotes, exemplary for a work of academic reference but perhaps indicating that Ogden's text, though written in an engaging and accessible style, delivers a decidedly dense read for the non-classicist who doesn't immediately know their Polybius from their Pausanias. Not exactly a page-turner, yet quite probably the best book that will ever be written on the topic.

★★★★



The UFO Chronicles

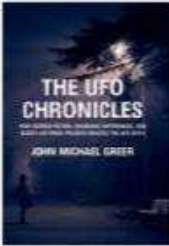
How Science Fiction, Shamanic Experiences and Secret Air Force Projects Created the UFO Myth

John Michael Greer

Aeon Books 2020

Pb, 270pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781912807895

This book is an updating of an earlier title, *The UFO Phenomenon: Fact, Fantasy and Disinformation*, but it needs very little updating, as its premise is as valid now as then. Greer has a background in esotericism and is a member of a number of occult orders, which has perhaps allowed him to step outside the extraterrestrial sceptic/believer argument that has bedevilled ufology.



The first section, "Tracking the Phenomenon", presents the best brief outline of the history of UFOs and ufology I have come across, looking beyond Kenneth Arnold's experience to the science fiction pulps of the 1930s, to Charles Fort and to the scientific and occult speculations of earlier centuries. He explains how these sources have been critical to the development of the UFO phenomenon, by framing it in terms of entities from elsewhere intervening in worldly affairs.

Greer sees the debate dominated by two inimical groups, the ETH believers on one side and the Null Hypothesis proponents on the other. But both these groups are as one in assuming that what is being debated is the existence or non-existence of extraterrestrial spacecraft. The ETH side argues that if a sighting is not an hallucination, a hoax or a misidentification, it must be an extraterrestrial spacecraft. The Null Hypothesis proponents turn this on its head, claiming that as there are no extraterrestrial spacecraft, it must be an hallucination, hoax or misidentification.

The point both sides miss is that there is no need to either prove or disprove the existence of any alien hardware, as there are many human experiences, like shamanic journeys, spiritual visions and entirely internal visions such as hypnogogic and hypnopompic imagery, as well as sensory phenomena triggered by experiences such as "highway hypnosis". Greer notes, from his background in occultism, that

one established way of generating visionary experiences is simply to stare at the sky for long periods.

He reviews a number of other explanations for the UFO phenomena, such as "earth-lights" and Persinger's neurological hypothesis. A particularly interesting chapter on government attitudes to UFOs suggests that reports can be exploited, or created, to distract attention from secret military projects. Although this idea can stray into conspiracy theorising, Greer maintains a balanced approach, typical of the whole book.

If you are going to read just one UFO book this year – or any other year – make it this one.

John Rimmer

★★★★★

Manifesting Spirits

An Anthropological Study of Mediumship and the Paranormal

Jack Hunter

Aeon Books 2020

Pb, 268pp, £29.99, ISBN 9781912807888

In *Manifesting Spirits* Jack Hunter addresses a gap in anthropological research on mediumship and the paranormal with his timely focus on the practices of the Bristol Spirit Lodge, a small spiritualist home-circle in the United Kingdom. Through his experiential approach, Hunter argues that he takes the social reality of spirits seriously, unlike classic studies in which spirits continually fail in tests against objective empirical standards. Instead, he seeks to understand the social processes by which spirits are manifested and brought into being, where communication is facilitated in séances carried out according to precise procedures and conditions.

The most fascinating parts of this book are the accounts of the Bristol Spirit Lodge's practices, threaded through with Hunter's experiences. He traces the rise of private spiritualist groups and resurgence of interest in physical mediumship from the 1990s, following in the wake of the Scole Experiments and their published recommendations, and provides a useful explanation of how these differ from dominant Spiritualist Churches under the Spiritualist National Union, while continuing established spiritualist traditions.

Hunter's case-study offers valu-



able glimpses into the working practices of physical mediumship: visiting mediums arrive with a phalanx of spirit guides who help facilitate sessions that focus on trance states and the possibility of spirit manifestations, such as ectoplasm or knocking, witnessed by the circle leader and accompanying sitters. Hunter’s account traces some contradictory and nuanced practices. For example, the lodge’s founder relies on insights from her spirit guide, “fuzzy critter”, and emphasises opportunities to develop mediumship skills. At the same time, she sees her role as an objective and sceptical observer, while the séances are presented as experiments in the name of science. These ethnographic insights help challenge prevailing scholarly claims about approaches to spirit.

Hunter’s intriguing experiences at the Bristol Spirit Lodge are contextualised by comprehensive analyses of social science approaches to spirit possession and the “paranormal”. While clearly relevant, these theoretical sections read more like a textbook, and sometimes distract from his significant ethnography that addresses the under-researched territory of spirit communication in the West. A revised version of Hunter’s doctoral thesis, partly comprising reworked versions of previous articles, it is repetitive at times, and surprisingly lacks a strong central thread. However, it also means each chapter can be read as a stand-alone account in which Hunter’s enduring and passionate dedication to radical questions about spirit, consciousness, and reality really shines through.

Helen Cornish
★★★★

The Science of Sci-Fi Music

Andrew May

Springer 2020

Pb, 158pp, £17.99, ISBN 9783030478322

Writing about music may admittedly be like dancing about architecture, but this book makes satisfying reading. Part of Swiss publisher Springer’s Science and Fiction series, the book is elegantly written, thought provoking and

entertaining. Film music features largely, along with scientific music, automated composition, SF themes in musical culture, and more. The theremin is in there from page one and there is a section on musicians who have declared themselves to be extra-terrestrial, such as Sun Ra from Saturn.

Why does some music lend itself so perfectly to SF themes? Andrew May bravely attempts to answer this difficult question partly by explaining in mathematical terms the concept of dissonance and harmony in music. This may well be useful for some readers, but as a numerically-challenged composer, I was left rather baffled.

Occasionally, music’s SF associations may only exist in a title: Gustav Holst’s best known musical work, which many would regard as archetypal space travel music, has a surprising history. Holst was greatly impressed by *Five Pieces for Orchestra* by the atonal composer Schoenberg, and obtained the score. Echoes of Schoenberg may be detected in *Seven Pieces for Large Orchestra*, which Holst composed several years later. Renamed *The Planets Suite*, with a piece for each planet of the Solar System, the title relates not to astronomy but to astrology! Echoes of Holst may, incidentally, be detected in much of today’s orchestral film music: compare the *Lord of the Rings* theme with Jupiter, for instance.

Film directors often use well-known “temp tracks” to edit their films to, and sometimes end up preferring these to music that has been specially composed. May relates how hapless composer Alex North composed and recorded a complete (and apparently brilliant) score for *2001* only to have it rejected by Kubrick in favour of the temp tracks.

Desmond Leslie, flying saucer enthusiast and futurist composer of the 1950s, is featured; so is Philip K Dick, a fan of ambient music who apparently based one of his characters on Brian Eno. I thought I knew this subject well, but was surprised and delighted to find lots in the book that was quite new to me. Highly recommended.

Steve Marshall
★★★★

Cymroglyphics

KR Broadstock

Cymroglyphics Ltd 2021

Pb, 235pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781916287549

“You can learn to read and write Egyptian hieroglyphics in hours – not years” is the bold claim made on the cover of *Cymroglyphics*.

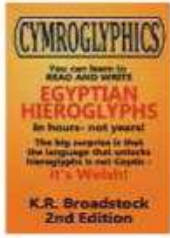
Broadstock’s theory is that hieroglyphics can be interpreted using the Welsh language as its key. But is it really possible to read and write hieroglyphics through a knowledge of Welsh? And why the Cymric language?

In developing his thesis, the author dismisses established scholarship by eminent linguists and historians such as Jean-François Champollion (Rosetta Stone decipherer) and Sir EA Wallis Budge, the editor of a dictionary of hieroglyphics which remains a seminal reference today.

As Champollion pointed out, in a sentence quoted by Broadstock, “Hieroglyphic writing is a complex system, a script all at once figurative, symbolic and phonetic, in one and the same text, in one and the same sentence, and, I might even venture, in one and the same word.” This is an inescapable truth which cannot be avoided by venturing into another, completely unrelated, language in an attempt to simplify that complexity.

Of course, this kind of extrapolation is not new. During the 19th century a wave of “Celticism” swept across Europe; a variety of authors jumped onto this bandwagon, such as Abbé Henri Boudet, known to enthusiasts of the Rennes-le-Château mystery. He claimed in *La Vraie Langue Celtique* (1886) that the Celts of southwest France would have spoken modern English, rather than a Celtic tongue (FT251:62).

Like Boudet and his misguided efforts to link the Celts to English, Broadstock employs numerous tortuous phonetic examples to demonstrate a supposed connection between the syllables of Welsh and the symbols of Egyptian hieroglyphs. For instance, “the Cymric word for an explorer is ‘tremynydd’. This can be broken into tri (three) mynydd (mountain). So the hieroglyphic for an explorer is 3 mountains.”



Cymroglyphics appears to be part of a broader campaign, online and offline, to promote “Britain’s hidden history”. Espoused by Broadstock and authors such as Alan Wilson and Baram Blackett, their *Moses In The Hieroglyphs* (2013) represents an earlier example of this theme.

While these flights of fancy may be attractive to anyone familiar with the “alternative history” genre, the research has little grounding in scientific linguistic scholarship and, as such, should be read purely as entertainment. Welsh, the ancient language that survives and thrives to this day, stands with its own heritage, and has no need for claims associating it with Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Marcus Williamson
★★

Paranormal Concept Show Extra

Paul Rook, Kerry Greenaway & Richard Clements

Paranormal Concept 2020

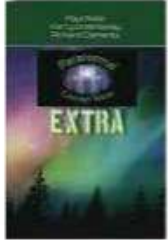
Pb, 246pp, £9.99, ISBN 9798585816147

The first rule of self-publishing: get someone to proofread it. This book even has a typo in the back cover blurb, and the writers need to learn that the plurals of “mirror” and “ghost” aren’t “mirrors” and “ghosts”! The layout is awful, with no hyphenation and with frequent line gaps in the middle of sentences. No surprise that there’s no index – but there isn’t even a contents page.

Paranormal Concept Show Extra is a collection of short blogs by the presenters of the Paranormal UK Radio Network, on a variety of topics including Tarot, time travel, ghosts, spirit photography, Nikola Tesla, grays, mermaids and much more – all great forteen subjects. Some are quite interesting, but many are little more than musings. They’re not even edited for book publication, so several finish with “Until next time, take care” or similar.

Maybe regular followers of the show will find this worthwhile, but there are so many better books of this type.

Chris Hayhurst
★



As everybody knows...

Lucy R Fisher enjoys two guides to doubting and deconstructing those “facts” that have become established in our collective knowledge

Fake History

From Mozart’s Murder to Cleopatra’s Asp

Graeme Donald

Michael O’Mara 2021

Pb, 256pp, £7.99, ISBN 9781789293623

Fake History

Ten Great Lies and How They Shaped the World

Otto English

Wellbeck 2021

Hb, 320pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781787396395

You wait all day for a sceptical history – and then two come along with the same title. There is some crossover (our ancestors knew the Earth was round), but perspectives differ. Otto English debunks “history that will make children proud to be British”, while Graeme Donald ranges over time and space, taking in Joan of Arc, Herodotus, the Easter Island statues and a long list of “what you know that ain’t so”.

Donald’s reliably fact-checked material is sorted under headings: Smoke and Mirrors (legendary lives); Voyages of Discovery (that’s “discovery by white men”); Murder Most Foul (cold cases from Cleopatra to Dreyfus); Riddles of Ritual and Religion (Stonehenge, the pyramids); Conflict and Catastrophe (the Incas, the Light Brigade).

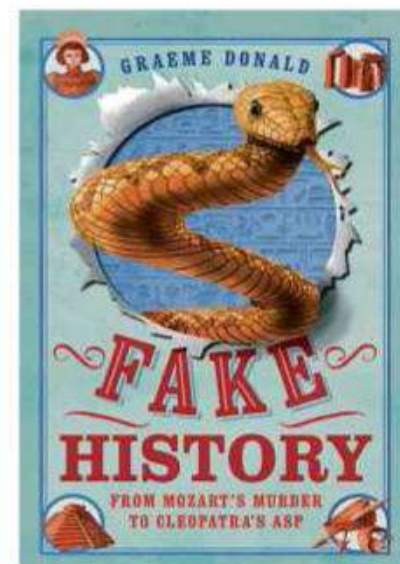
Much of the history we remember originated in short stories, novels, satires and films, he reveals. Popular historical propaganda depicted past generations as ignorant, blinkered and grimy. Ninjas were created for “sword-and-sake” movies. The Spanish Inquisition was comparatively mild. Best mates Robin Hood and Richard I shared neither a country nor a language. Joan of Arc “wasn’t French, she never commanded any army... and she was not executed for witchcraft”, but a fake Joan unified France in the 19th century.

Who knew that the court of Nicholas and Alexandra was

“obsessed with the occult”, and both royals were addicted to “barbiturates, opium and cocaine”? Or that doubt was increasingly cast on the conclusions of Sir Bernard Spilsbury, the forensic pathologist who sent many to the gallows, and he eventually took his own life in his laboratory? Though I’m not convinced “Lincoln Green” was really red.

Your grandmother’s sagas are disinformation writ small – or as Otto English puts it: “Family stories sit in the headwaters that feed the tributaries of the great toxic river of fake history.” Having sown doubt, he deconstructs nationalism, political apologies, Ladybird history, self-mythologising and “othering”. We aren’t the only ones who think we’re exceptional.

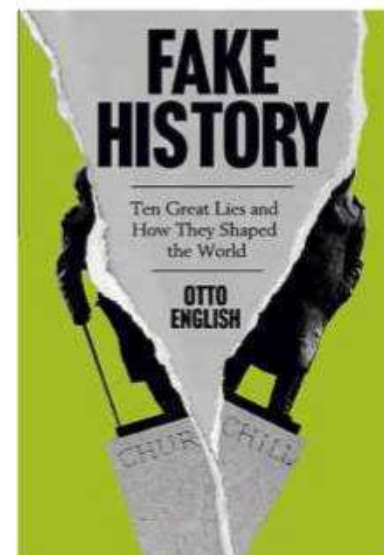
English’s research is solid – he has read Hitler’s turgid *Mein Kampf* (“My Struggle”), and even sat through a patriotic North Korean opera so that we don’t have to (he liked it). His historical “great lies” include: Winston Churchill was Britain’s Greatest Prime Minister; Abraham Lincoln Believed that “All Men Are Created Equal”, Hitler Was a Failed Artist, The Good Old Days Were Good. Churchill is revealed as flawed – though without mention of his 1910 plan to sterilise the



“unfit”. Lincoln, though against slavery, didn’t support “the social and political equality of the white and black races”. Hitler’s feeble paintings were just part of his self-delusion. In the “good

old days”, women and children had far fewer rights. In general, good stories like Alfred and the Cakes are as trustworthy as the ludicrous output of North Korea’s propaganda department.

Both books could have done with an editor. When they come off, as they mainly do, the jokes are funny: Donald calls an accountant “the chap with the



abacus”, and English asks: “Why did Richard I die at the hands of a crossbowman clutching a frying pan, on the outskirts of Limoges? What was wrong with Bishop’s Stortford?”.

However, both authors are prone to garbling extended metaphors. “Churchill’s conflicting instincts left him playing an elaborate game of political Twister with a foot simultaneously in every political camp.” Churchill was a millipede? Yes, ignorance can be dangerous, but we need to make this clear, not obscure. I won’t say which writer perpetrated the following: “The knotweed of stupidity can sow deleterious ignorance of the past.”

Despite a few flaws, both books are enjoyable and informative. They should lead readers to doubt those facts that “everybody knows”, and therefore avoid both uninformed denial or the kind of overconfidence that shortened the life of a 19th-century parachute designer. Why the frying pan? Time for a new legend.

Donald ★ ★ ★
English ★ ★ ★

The Static Alignments

Austin Osman Spare’s School of Draughtsmanship

Frank Letchford, William Wallace, Michael Staley & Stephen Pochin

Jerusalem Press 2020

Hb, 310pp, £30, ISBN 9780956700452

Austin Osman Spare – even just uttering his name is like an incantation. Spare is an artist of today; his close friendship with Sylvia Pankhurst and affinity with gender fluency show that his work is eternal and timeless, not limited by any man-made movement or category.

This magnificent book is the first to delve deeply into the actual working world of Spare-the-artist. Rather than the popular vision of Spare in a damp and dingy basement surrounded by cats with sigils pouring down the chimney and out through his hands onto the paper, we have a sophisticated and nuanced artist at work using modern technology such as slide projectors; a large section of the book is devoted to his work with photography.

Spare was seriously committed to educating practitioners in the techniques involved with his forms of draughtsmanship. The exactitude of his notes regarding materials and the wonderful directions of how to guide one’s thoughts and ideas make for fascinating and hypnotic reading.

One student was shocked by Spare’s wild, unkempt appearance, describing him as “unwashed”, though he found the teaching quarters “reasonably tidy”.

Igor Stravinsky once said that the only freedom is through discipline. The message of this book is that even the most apparently otherworldly artist of the occult has to be grounded with a classic training so that their draughtsmanship is second to none. It is refreshing to see the real power of art’s potentiality to unlock portals into the other worlds, portals which are not opened by ego and the desperation for fame but instead by skill, discipline and constant training – and Spare is a supreme example.

This is easily the best book on how to truly achieve the occult transcendental in art that I have ever read.

Ian Charles Scott
★★★★★



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Northampton by night

Alan Moore, with the help of director Mitch Jenkins, makes a rare foray into cinema: the result is a fan-pleasing surrealist detective story stuffed with red herrings and pop culture references



The Show

Dir Mitch Jenkins, UK 2021
Available on digital platforms

Possibly the first film Alan Moore hasn't demanded to have his name removed from, *The Show* is a typically phantasmagorical offering from the great man that delights, confounds and annoys in equal measure in the way that Moore himself has done for decades. Building on a series of shorts called *Show Pieces*, it's set in Northampton (natch) and deals with the idea that there is another world in which dead people live again, but only in people's dreams. Or something like that; it's difficult to pin down exactly, but Moore and director Mitch Jenkins choose to explore the idea in the form of a detective story.

Steven Lipman (Tom Burke) comes to Northampton enquiring about an old friend. Turns out the guy died the night before; after making enquiries at the hospital Lipman learns from a creepy porter that it happened in unusual circumstances and he discovers that one particular item from the dead man's personal effects is missing. Following the trail, Lipman encounters a seemingly endless number of oddball characters, and as he learns more about his dead friend we learn more about the town, and indeed Lipman himself.

The first half hour is brilliant: atmospheric, unsettling, bizarre,

There's so much interesting stuff going on below the surface

spoofy, funny, and intriguing. While there are so many cultural references in Moore's work that it's easy to miss them, we could point out that Burke's character has a thick mane of unruly black hair and wears a red and black striped jumper, which, if you're of a certain age, cues you to immediately think of Dennis the Menace, one of the most beloved British comic characters of them all. Part of Moore's skill as a writer, and of Jenkins as a director, is letting you pat yourself on the back for spotting a reference, only to surprise you with it again later when you've forgotten all about it and it reappears at a crucial juncture.

There's a wonderful pastiche of 1940s hardboiled detective fiction – the film turns to black and white – when Lipman engages the services of what he thinks is a bona fide firm of private investigators only to discover that it's a couple of kids working out of their garden shed: it's *The Maltese Falcon* meets *Swallows and Amazons*.

As Lipman moves through the town, piecing together clues,

he meets an endless parade of eccentrics, including a landlady who conducts walking tours of Northampton at night and Herbert Sherbert, the lead singer of a local band, and so on (and on). However, this is the main problem with the film: there's just too much of this stuff. There are so many kooky individuals you can't keep track of them. Is that the vampire stand-up comedian or the female drug baron called John the Conqueror, or Faith, the local journalist with a taste for erotic asphyxiation? Moore himself appears as a dead nightclub entertainer from the 1970s called Frank Metterton and plays him as a kind of a Viv Stanshall professional eccentric.

The other problem is, as is often the case with convoluted mystery stories, once the mystery starts to get explained and things become clearer the pleasingly foggy atmosphere dissipates. In an attempt to compensate, director Jenkins reaches for a genre ending – a shootout in a dilapidated warehouse with the villain holding the hero's girl hostage. Okay, this is an Alan Moore script, so there are twists even to this hoariest of movie climaxes, but it's run of the mill compared to all that's gone before.

Those aren't massive problems though, and *The Show* is a very entertaining film. Sometimes it's best to let this kind of dark surrealism just wash over you and not ask too many questions of it – but with Alan Moore you are supposed to ask questions, because there's so much interesting stuff going on just beneath the surface that it requires as much attention as the words and images. I'm sure this will repay multiple viewings just to catch all the references. If that's a bridge too far for the casual viewer, there's still loads to enjoy.

Daniel King



Halloween Kills

Dir David Gordon Green, US 2021
On general release

Nostalgia has long since cemented itself as a profitable segment of the entertainment industry, and when Jamie Lee Curtis reprised her career-making role of Laurie Strode in 2018's *Halloween*, the franchise became the latest fan favourite of yesteryear to return to the big screen.

Wiping the slate clean of the numerous lacklustre sequels that followed 1981's *Halloween II*, the new *Halloween* turned out to be one of the better attempts at revitalising a franchise. Seeing a mature Laurie return, ready for battle while also examining the impact past horrors had on her life, her family and their interpersonal relationships, lent a certain gravitas to the re-tread of the 1978 original.

Picking up directly where the last movie left off, *Halloween Kills* unfortunately fails to follow up on what its predecessor established. In spite of what the previous film (and the trailers for the new one) chose to emphasise, the narrative of three generations of women dealing with how Michael Myers's evil deeds affected their lives in various ways is largely sidelined this time around. Instead, *Halloween Kills* puts too much emphasis on nods to the previous films, revisiting a myriad of images and characters from the original movie. While the roster of returning characters – many portrayed by the original actors – is impressive, this level of fan service becomes more of a distraction than an enrichment. And as a result, *Halloween Kills* takes the focus off what gave the 2018 film an advantage in the nostalgia market and falls short of what it could have been.

Leyla Mikkelsen



TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings



Paranormal Witness SyFy

Last time, I looked at an example of the more hysterical end of the paranormal TV spectrum (*Paranormal Caught On Camera*), replete with low-light whooping and uncritical analyses. While many series fall, or indeed career headlong, into this category, there are also some genuinely well made, sensible and balanced programmes out there, with the added bonus of being considerably more unnerving for all that. *Paranormal Witness* is just such a programme.

From the start, it signals firmly what its standpoint is: straight narrative, given proper time to develop, and first-hand

testimony from ostensibly sane, rational people; and it laudably confines itself to two stories per episode. Series 1, Episode 3 is a good example. The opening credits are very much in the US horror genre – jump cuts, *Saw*-style lettering – but once they are done the show settles into an altogether more sober format (except for the sustained use of edgy discordant music and breathy, growly sound effects).

Using a mixture of

The phenomena soon ratchet up, with spectacular telekinesis

straight-to-camera narration by the witnesses themselves (though they are clearly answering interview prompts, neither the questions nor questioner feature) and dramatic reconstructions, the tales are told chronologically, often from multiple viewpoints. The first part of the episode, “The Poltergeist”, charts a particularly virulent polt attack on a suburban family, starting with the usual low-level polty stuff (mysterious stains, stuff being chucked about, doors slamming; with teenagers at home this could all be entirely non-paranormal in origin). However, the phenomena soon ratchet up, with spectacular telekinesis. In one rather startling vignette the family had attempted to make peace with the presence with the gift of a small ceramic cat placed on the mantelpiece: when polt stuff continued regardless, the father took it from the

shelf and threw it down the garden; when he returned to the lounge seconds later, the figurine was back. Then, overnight, the word “cat” was scrawled all over the house; this is illustrated with multiple photos taken at the time. This scene is particularly effective, as are later elements when the presence starts attacking pets and eventually people.

The rest of the episode, “Watched in the Wilderness”, features Jeff Boiler, a former Oregon US Deputy Sheriff, describing his encounter with a Sasquatch. Off-duty and hiking in a remote area of the Cascades, Boiler first sees the creature up-close and is then actively chased by it from the area. The calm, professional testimony coupled with a well-constructed re-enactment is utterly compelling, and the genuine terror Boiler felt tangible. The whole series is of a similar standard, and could teach a good many shows a lot about less being more.

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

How's this for a plot? “Joan Collins gives an unforgettable performance as a stripper cursed by a sinister dwarf to give birth to a demonic child.” Yes, 1975's *The Monster* (aka *I Don't Want to Be Born*) has reached Blu-ray (Network, £12.99), and it's an absolute hoot. Where else can you see a baby transform into “Hercules” the dwarf and punch or drown adults directly from his crib? Donald Pleasence is a concerned doctor who tells Collins that despite her baby's homicidal tendencies, it's “a bit early” to get the psychiatrists in. Ralph Bates plays the husband with an utterly pointless (yet strangely amusing) Italian accent. Watch out for the many location scenes of London.

The commentary says these were put in to pad out the running time, but they end up offering a fabulous window on the period. Kids' TV presenter Floella Benjamin even appears in her first ever role. She kindly tweeted me about the film, saying what a “great experience” it was to work with Joan Collins, even if it was in a scene where a possessed baby grins at her with his mother's blood dripping from his lips. I wonder if that's what inspired Floella to join the cast of *Play School* the following year.

For a classic horror fix, try *The Dark Eyes of London* (Blu-ray, Network, £12.99). Bela Lugosi plays a mad scientist who becomes a serial killer as part of an insurance racket. Tame by today's standards it

Donald Pleasence thinks it's “a bit early” to get the psychiatrists in

might be, but in 1939 the film was the first to receive the ‘H’ for Horrific certificate in the UK. It has various sadistic scenes of murder, which prompted the Catholic Legion of Decency to condemn it for its “excessive brutality and gruesomeness”. Which is probably the reason you're thinking of watching it.

Some films don't attempt to be scary... but end up frightening viewers anyway. Like *The Singing Ringing Tree*, which has been described as the “scariest kid's TV show ever”. This 1957 German fairy tale epic (Blu-ray, Network, £12.99) is actually quite a charming story of a young Prince winning the hand

of a princess by procuring her greatest desire... a tree that can sing. Yet the sheer weirdness of presentation creeped English audiences out back in the day. The vivid colour palate and studio sets do create an atmosphere of magical claustrophobia, and the characters are rather cruel at times. Yet I wonder if 1960s kids were simply scared of the strangely *foreign* feel of it all. Whether it was xenophobia or not, something has combined with the hauntological aspects of “old TV”, turning what was designed as a heart-warming family experience into the type of film one probably should not watch while on drugs.

Room for one more? *Terrified* (Blu-ray, Acorn, £12.99) is an Argentinian horror presented under the ‘Shudder Original’ banner which features not just a haunted house, but an entire haunted street. Bargain! I found it to be creepy and unique with some well-crafted scares.



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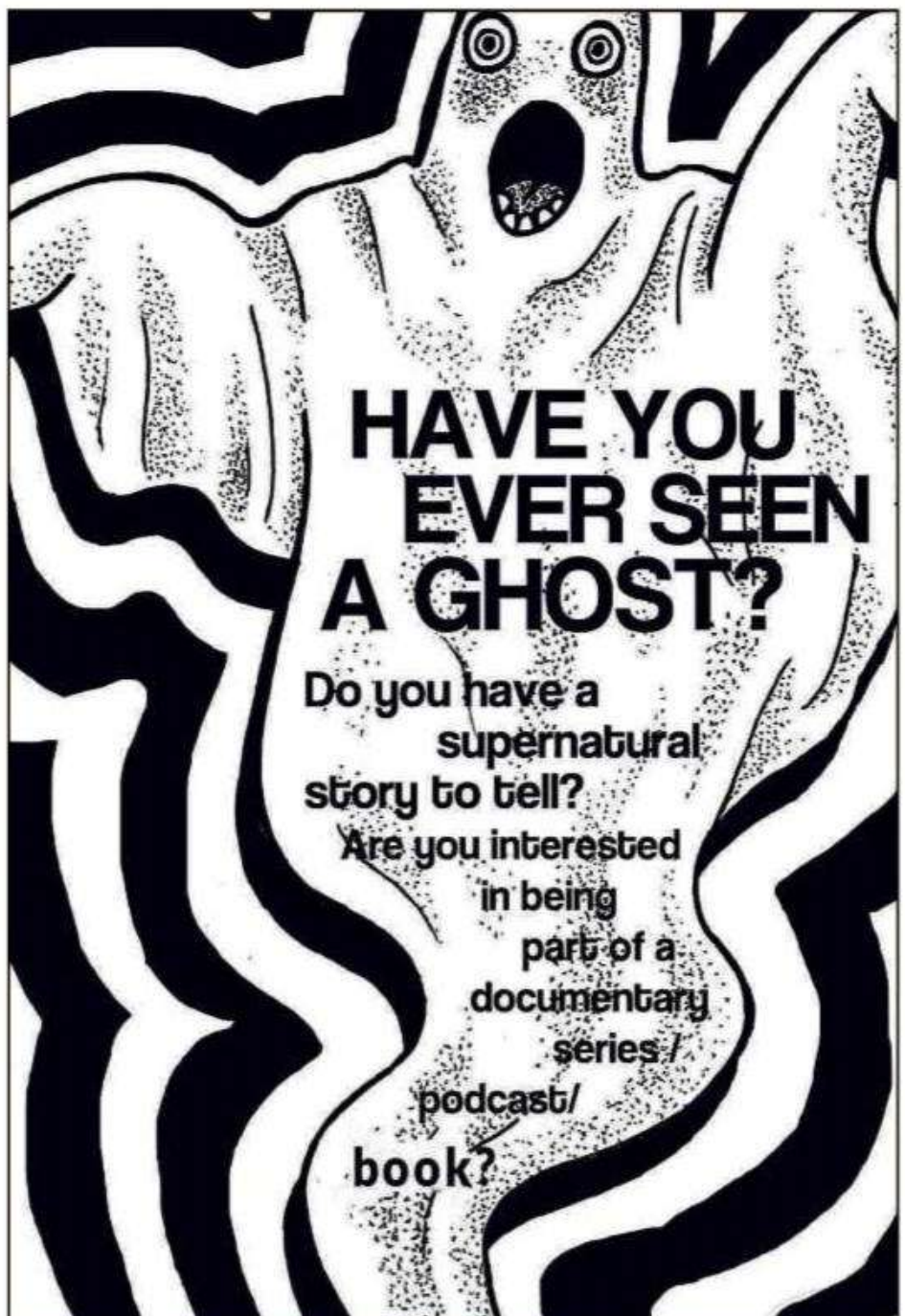
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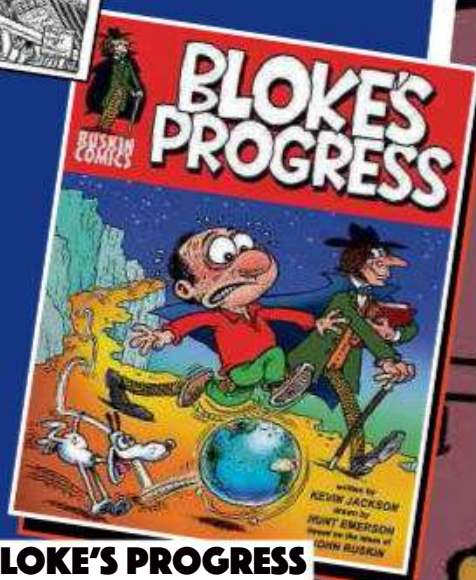
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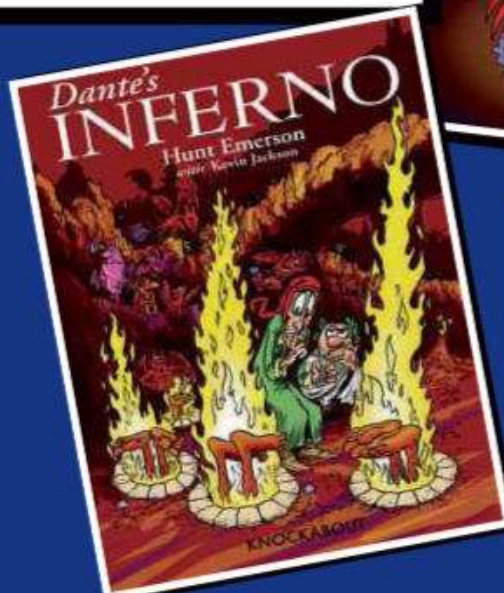
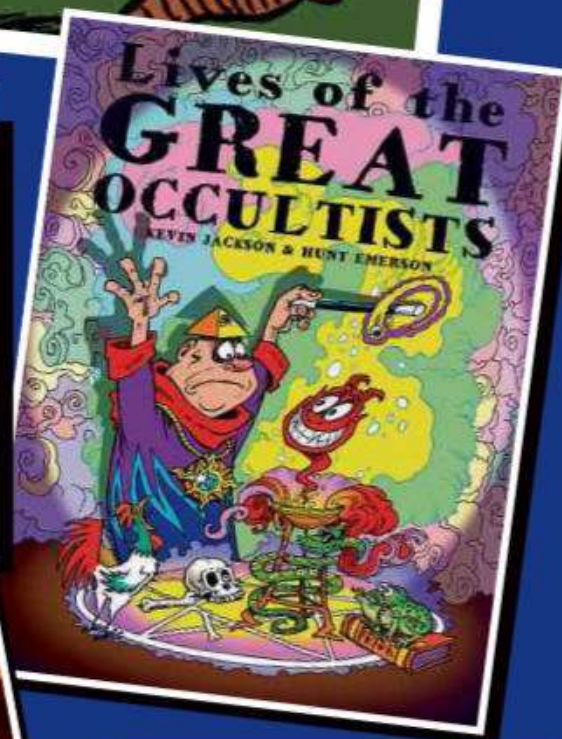
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Bosky mumbling

The correspondence about the Whispering Corner in Lytchett Maltravers, Dorset [FT410:73] brings to mind the experience of six members of WATSUP (the Wessex Association for the Study of Unexplained Phenomena), who undertook a vigil there on the night of 27 August 1977. At around 11pm, three of the party heard a mumbling sound emanating from the copse adjacent to the Whispering Corner. A tape recorder failed to register the sound, but the dog of one of those present appeared to react to it: its tail went down, its ears were pricked, and its hackles raised. The mumbling was described as sounding like two people in conversation without specific words being audible. The original report appeared in the *WATSUP Journal* #8, which gave the names of those involved.

Nick Maloret
Milton, Hampshire

Daimons

In light of Richard Freeman's letter [FT410:72], I feel obliged to defend the honour of my book *Mystery Big Cats*, and that of my brother Patrick Harpur's *Daimonic Reality*.

Richard cites a few proofs of the physical existence of leopards in our landscape – and indeed there have been more. My book attempts to balance these material traces against the vast body of anecdotal evidence, suggesting a different way to evaluate both.

I know how annoying the idea of daimons is to proponents of the nuts-and-bolts theory of ABCs as literal escapees (I was once one myself) – and among those proponents there is none more distinguished than Richard, who has undertaken many difficult field trips in order to film reported cryptids, so far without success. It takes a stout heart such as Richard's not to give up the search in the face of how exasperating it can be. My view is that the annoyingness is intrinsic to the phenomenon, and provokes us to look at ABCs and other cryptids from a wider – I would

Hands off the cake!



I thought you might be amused by this notice.
Tony Sandy, by email

say more fortean – perspective.

My thesis certainly hangs on the coat tails of Patrick's classic *Daimonic Reality*. That book places daimons in our history and traditional cultures as intermediate creatures, bridging borders between worlds and dimensions, and casting doubt on our modern insistence that materiality is synonymous with reality.

Daimons are important because they imply that reality is a lot more complicated than we now customarily think. So, if it wasn't for the fact that I admire Richard's work as an intrepid, unorthodox explorer, his dismissal of the existentially revelatory, ancient Greek *daimones* as mere 'spooks' might have got me, er – slightly miffed!

Merrily Harpur
Cattistock, Dorset

Oldies but Goodies

The *Mysterious World* article [FT410:32-39] provided a warm nostalgic bear hug. The series led me down the path to a subscription to FT. The article brought to mind the episode of *The Goodies* from their ITV years where Graeme Garden playing Arthur C Clarke sitting in front of Stonehenge dismissing the ancient astronaut theory while a UFO landed behind him, pulled a

petrol pump out from one of the stones and refuelled. A caption then came up saying that the show had been cancelled as it had been proved that Arthur C Clarke didn't exist.

Darren Floyd
Cardiff

When I received the new FT, I was delighted to see the feature on Arthur C Clarke's *Mysterious World*. This was a deeply influential television series in my life, and I can vividly recall saving up for the hardback book. Many years later, I tracked down the DVD and it was just as captivating as I remembered. By coincidence, I opened the magazine just as I had sat down with my four-year-old son in front of another favourite childhood DVD, in this case *The Goodies*. He was watching his favourite episode, 'Bigfoot', a spoof of *Mysterious World*, in which Bill and Tim set off to prove the existence of Arthur. On the programme they encounter Nessie, a UFO, and a Yeti, and view a version of the Patterson-Gimlin film.

This led me to muse upon how central forteana is to me, and how delighted I am that my son seems to be developing a love of it too. I fervently hope I can help instil good critical thinking skills coupled to a mind that is open to

the weird and wonderful of the 'damned data'. *Fortean Times* is a joy to receive every month, and I've been a subscriber for longer than I can remember. It always manages to strike the right balance of reason and pure wonder. I thank the Gang of Fort for being reliable and rigorous in the face of all the cynical, manipulative misinformation out there, and for entertaining me so much over the years.

Simon Ramshaw
Woodham, Surrey

Proof of Hedgehogs

The constant presence in our pockets of mobile phones does not imply that there should be ample photographic evidence for all kinds of forteana. Try taking a picture of even a common bird without preparation. It took me ages to get a non-blurry picture of the jackdaws that frequent the green outside my house. As for the red kites that regularly circle over the same space, even though they are very large birds, I've yet to catch an identifiable picture of one. Rabbits, bats, hedgehogs and foxes also make regular visits, and I once saw a badger at the bus stop at five in the morning; it went snuffling past me on its way somewhere, 4ft (1.2m) of muscle and claws – but you will have to take my word for the existence of all these fabulous beasts, as I've never caught a picture of any of them.

I can prove the existence of roe deer, but of course I could have doctored those pics.

Dean Teasdale
Gateshead, Tyne & Wear

Wild talent?

I met a guy last year in a pub in Halifax, who answers questions in rhyme. At first I thought he was simply reciting poems he had written, but then I realised he was giving specific answers to my specific questions. I wish I had written down some of the things he said, but I was just caught up with the moment. Paranormal? No. Odd? Definitely.

Andy Owens
Halifax, West Yorkshire

SIMULAGRA CORNER

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.



1. Rebecca Lane noticed this 'ghoul' on a waste bin liner. "It's actually the reflection of the overhead light behind me, falling into the contours of the bag and forming this face," she said. "There was nothing inside the bag, such as a magazine

cover for example, showing through."

2. Sharon Powles found this pebble portrait in June 2016 while beachcombing with her boyfriend Christian Swift at Cromer in Norfolk. She thought it

resembled Jesus while Christian plumped for Jim Morrison of the Doors. He took it to the *Eastern Daily Press* to be photographed "to prove that it hasn't been painted on, tampered with or photoshopped – because it looks too good to be true."

3. Damian Taylor noticed this face in the clouds during a thunderstorm.

4. Kelly Goss sent us this photo, taken by her mother, of a face on a gravestone in Herne Bay cemetery, Kent.



Birds' nests?

I am currently researching the lives of the London poor in the late 18th century, and came across a picture of a man described as a “street seller of birds’ nests”. He is carrying a tray of 10 or so birds’ nests filled with eggs. The accompanying copy reads: “I am a seller of birds’-nesties, snakes, slow-worms, adders, lizards, hedgehogs, frogs and snails – That’s all I sell in the summertime. I go out bird nesting three times a week...”

But why? What possible use could one find for a bird’s nest? Suggestions welcome.

Caraline Brown

By email

Pompadour precursor?

Liberace’s Conover ‘Pompadour’ piano with its vertical sound-board [FT408:34] has a precursor in a strange instrument called the Clavicytherium, made in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. This was a harpsichord with vertical soundboard and strings, enabling it to project sound more effectively: as Edward Kottick puts it, “Close proximity to the soundboard provides the player with an overwhelming sense of sonic immersion” (*A History of the Harpsichord*, 2002, p.294). This arrangement also, of course, saved space. The Clavicytherium – it sounds rather like a cryptid – is the sort of object you might have expected to turn up in ethereal folk or prog music from the early Seventies, but I don’t think it ever did.

Richard George

St Albans, Hertfordshire

Holy row'

I very much enjoyed Gail-Nina Anderson’s thoughtful response to the controversy over the so-called Walthamstow statue of the Madonna [FT409:76]. This identification was questioned because the sight of the apparent exposure of the figure’s right thigh down to its ankle was deemed ‘erotic’. She is right in



Blurry

Congratulations to Rob Gandy for introducing us to a new winner in the highly contested category of “Most Ambiguous Photograph of a Ghost”. The image accompanying his “Weird Wheels of the Wolds” article [FT407:49] is allegedly of a phantom woman, and was described by the leader of the team who took the photo in 2009 as “by far the best ghostly image we’ve ever caught on camera”. But as Rob so diplomatically put it: “I must confess that I cannot make out any specific features”.

You are not alone, Rob. I haven’t tried to make out anything that blurry since I fell asleep wearing my contact lenses. Recent years have seen a massive increase in the number of cameras in the world. Today there are over 4.8 billion smartphones, most of which are rarely out of reach of their owners. It is estimated that 1.4 trillion photos will be taken in 2021. That’s the equivalent of one photograph every second for the next 44,000 years. If ghosts are capable of being photographed, wouldn’t we expect to have seen a significant increase in the quality of photographic evidence for their existence?

Martin Stubbs. *London*

calling it an example of misinterpretation. The figure’s left leg is hidden beneath sculpted folds of a garment, but the right leg is revealed by the pretence that this leg is pressing against the cloth, giving it a shape. Obviously the sculptor was aiming for something more dynamic than a classic standing figure with both legs carefully concealed as prudish piety demands. To the dismay of moralists, this argument is perennial.

Students of divinity and art will probably know of an even more notorious example – Bernini’s famous ‘transverberation of St Teresa’, on display in the Vatican, created in 1651. The saint is depicted as fainting backwards, her eyes heavy-lidded and mouth slightly open in her ecstasy; the folds of her

habit revealing that her legs are slightly apart; her bare left foot dangling in space... all as the angel is about to thrust his ‘fiery dart’ into her heart. Bernini’s depiction was certainly “non-traditional”, but had he transformed St Teresa’s “sublime experience of mystical union with the divine” into something “disturbingly profane”?

Jacob Burkhardt (1818-97) called the piece a “scandalous degradation of the supernatural” representing a kind of “lascivious” religious art “adorned with a beauty exciting to lust”. In a recent paper on the subject, ¹ Franco

Mormondo – a professor of Italian history at the Morrison College of Arts and Sciences, Boston – rebutted at great length the claims that the sculptor had followed St Teresa’s own description of the experience; that the Church had no problem with nudity in religious art; and that since there was no nudity involved there was no violation of decorum.

To be sure, the dilemma for the creator was to materialise an intensely private experience... but did Bernini turn it into “a luridly profane peep show”, as Simon Sharma put it?² It all turns, argues Mormondo, on what the Catholic Church calls “the near occasion of sin” and the concupiscence of Eve. This was the doctrine of the “lust of the eyes” – a catechesis which began with St Augustine (354-430) and consolidated by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). However, nowhere in these pious objections is any account taken of the near ubiquitous occurrence of eroticism apparent in other forms of ecstatic states of consciousness such as mediumship and shamanism.

Bob Rickard

London

NOTES

¹ Franco Mormondo, ‘Did Bernini’s Ecstasy of St. Teresa Cross a 17th-century Line of Decorum?’ Text of lecture to the Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting, Boston, 2016. [A revision dated December 2020 is available from his page on academia.edu].

² Simon Sharma, *The Power of Art* (2006).



“Don’t give me those puppy dog eyes.”

It Happened to Me...

Gone, gone, gone



When my son was around one, many items of his clothing began to inexplicably disappear. I can't over-emphasise the inexplicable nature of what occurred – all the items unquestionably disappeared in my house. The house is always secure, and there is no possibility of them being stolen or falling down the back of the sofa. The first item to disappear was his large padded duffle coat. It was a cold January afternoon; I had taken him to the park, brought him home, and removed his coat on the sofa. This is the last time I saw it, for when I next went to put it on, it was gone. A few weeks later, his new shoes, a pair of navy trainers with flashing lights, also disappeared, again from the house, as a pair. Again a few weeks later, his huge padded bobble hat with ear flaps went, and beyond doubt this was also from the house. Other items belonging to him also disappeared around this time, including a jumper his grandmother had knitted. None of my two-year-old daughter's clothes disappeared, and no one at any point entered the house who could have had either the opportunity or motivation to steal them.

One other bizarre event happened. One afternoon I was changing his clothes. He had a brand-new sailor's outfit, which was at the bottom of a box of clothes. I laid it out, and moments later, went to put it on. It was now soaking wet, drenched in some colourless and odourless liquid. The box was dry, the floor was dry, and no, he hadn't piddled on it as he was wearing a nappy. There was absolutely no rational explanation. He is now six and every so often his clothes still disappear from the house. It only happens to him.

I wonder if any readers have experienced such a phenomenon relating to one member of the household? I attach a few photos, one of my son in the disappearing coat and hat, and another, taken from an old photographic slide found in the Victorian darkroom at the bottom of my garden. It shows a few children standing next to the darkroom. It is an utter mystery what happened to my son's stuff, but we enjoy the idea that there are Victorian children running around the house adorned with his clothes. They would have great fun with the flashing trainers!

Olivia Thatcher

By email



Newstead Abbey

With reference to haunted woods [FT388:38-45]: a few years ago, I visited Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire, ancestral home of Lord Byron. It's a lovely walk from the station through old English woodland. The house is very impressive, with attached ruins, gardens and lake. It was a hot Saturday in late August and though I passed one or two walkers and a few cyclists, I had the overwhelming feeling that somebody or something was walking with me, a feeling that continued during a tour of the house. This didn't feel menacing or threatening.

A couple of years later I returned with my sister, taking the same route. I didn't tell her about my feelings during my earlier visit. After taking the tour of the house we went to the café for lunch. While we were eating I asked her what she thought about the house and the surroundings. Straight away she said she got the feeling that somebody had been watching us during our walk from the station to the house. Has anyone else had similar experiences at Newstead?

Steve Watkins

Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands

Homing Mice

Regarding Mat Coward's Mythchaser question about mice returning to their point of origin [FT395:25]: about 20 years ago, I was staying at my mother-in-law's house when I was woken just after midnight by a mouse in my bedroom. I couldn't go back to sleep with it scratching around, but I didn't want to chase it out of the door, as that would just be passing the problem on to someone else, so I decided to try and catch it. A humane trap from the kitchen was a complete failure, as was tempting it into the middle of the room

with nuts and trying to drop a cardboard box over it. Eventually, after hours of comedic attempts at stalking, I managed to catch it in a blanket. My original plan had been to get into the car, drive at least couple of miles so it wouldn't find its way back, and then release it. However, it was now three in the morning and frankly, I was knackered so I decided to just shake the blanket out of the window and worry about it later. I saw the mouse fly through the air and I'm pretty sure it would have survived the fall – I've seen hamsters fall from similar heights without damage – and it would have had a soft landing on the lawn. Next morning there was no sign of a mouse corpse on the grass.

A couple of weeks later I was sleeping in the same bedroom when I was very rudely awakened by a mouse sinking its teeth into my toe. I sat up with a yell and was just in time to see the culprit running out of the open bedroom door. Was this the same mouse back for revenge? I think it probably was. I'm sure I heard it laughing as it ran off.

Lisa Gledhill

Goring, Oxfordshire

More quantum pranks

After the publication of "The Quantum Prank" story [FT404:74], I was astounded to find out that other people had uncannily similar experiences. A friend of mine, Lance Glover, recounted his encounter:

"My own weird David Byrne experience happened in about 1990. Some work colleagues and I were having lunch at Ships Coffee Shop on Overland Avenue in Culver City, California, when David Byrne walked in. He asked the hostess something, then proceeded directly past our

table to a pay phone in the corner, where he made several calls. He then left by the same route, right past our table. About 10 minutes later he returned, made more calls and left again. Then it happened a third time. By this point, my friends and I were beginning to wonder if it was some kind of practical joke, but he didn't reappear, so we chalked it up to typical Los Angeles oddity (if you know LA you know what I mean).

Two days later a friend and I (he had been in the lunch group) arrived at Schoenberg Hall, UCLA, for a concert – John Cale with Michael Brook opening. We were way early, having come straight from work. It began to rain; my friend and I lit up a joint outside under the expansive eaves. A short time later we retreated to a side gallery housing an exhibit of mediæval music notation. My friend headed off to the restroom. Wandering transfixed among the beautiful manuscripts, I barely noticed someone entering the room. For many minutes I was aware of this person's presence, and thinking it might be my friend, I finally looked up to find myself face to face with David Byrne. He was as awkward as I was stoned. We both spent the next 15 minutes or so avoiding each other's gaze and staying engrossed in the content of the display cases. Finally, he left and was replaced by my friend and our dates, who had come separately. Early on in the concert I realised that Byrne was sitting in the row in front of us, only a few seats away. He left the concert early."

An artist friend of mine, Cathy Ward from London, writes: "The last time I was in New York, I asked a guy to allow me to sit at his vacant table in a full café – it was David Byrne. Maybe he's the Quantum Cafe Haunter! It was at an outside Art Fair and he was sitting on his own. Evidently everyone around bar me had clocked it was him. As it was the only place available, I had to ask him to let me sit down and he very charmingly got up and let me sit down. Only then did I realise it was him. I didn't bother



"I could still feel him watching me from the semi-darkness"

him except to say, 'Thank you'. Charming nice man."

When I wrote my Quantum Prank story about David Byrne, I believed that it was an isolated event; however, now it seems more like a repeating uncanny scenario with conspicuously similar details. In each situation, from out of nowhere, David Byrne appears unexpectedly. Each story is centred on a café or coffee shop. All of the events take place near an art gallery (or an "art fair" with scores of galleries). There is something incongruous about the circumstances that make it seem odd, like a practical joke (or prank). Could David Byrne be enacting similar Quantum Pranks at other cafés all around the multiverse? Maybe this is what he does all day long.

Jeffrey Vallance
Canoga Park, California

Paternal admonition

Our watering hole was the Dolphin pub on the corner of Gladstone Road and North Barrack Road in Deal, Kent [pictured above in 1952]. The scrumpy was very cheap and potent. On Friday, 11 August 1966, shortly after my 18th birthday, I was helped

home very drunk by my friends. They got me to my front door, knocked and fled, avoiding an encounter with my fearsome mother. She answered the door, dragged me inside and left me lying on the floor. I remember hearing her stomping up the stairs to her bedroom and the door slamming shut. After I lay there for a while, I felt a presence and opened my eyes. There, at the bottom of the stairs, stood my father,

dressed in his Royal Marines' Band uniform, as real as you or me. This was strange, as he had died when I was five years old.

I immediately sobered up. He stood there with such a disapproving look on his face, a look of disappointment, as if to ask, "What are you doing with yourself?" I got up and moved towards him, but he just seemed to move away. I went to the kitchen and made myself a cup of tea and a cheese sandwich. As I sat there, trying to make sense of what had happened, I could still feel him watching me from the semi-darkness of the hallway. Eventually, I decided to go to bed, which meant going past him, but all he did was gently move away. There was no movement of his arms or legs; he just seemed to glide. I made it to my bedroom, undressed and got into bed. He was there, just looking at me. Then I fell asleep. In the morning, I couldn't believe what had happened. I was unable to tell my mother. She was not speaking to me after my disgraceful behaviour the night before. Life went on as normal.

Stuart Smith
Walmer, Kent

Ice-cold prickle

I first heard of a ghost haunting the roads to the north-east of Newport Pagnell in an interview with Ruth Roper Wyld on Paul Bestall's excellent *Mysteries and Monsters* podcast. Ruth told of seeing an apparition in a donkey jacket

that was so deeply 'wrong' that she was too afraid to turn her car around and investigate. Apparently, the figure had been seen by a number of people in the area.

My friend Jackie Tonks and I had driven along the road at night some weeks before and seen nothing more spooky than a rabbit. More recently, however, we did experience something odd that Jackie found deeply disturbing. On Friday, 4 December 2020, we were driving along the road that links Newport Pagnell to the village of North Crawley. It was around 10.30pm. The North Crawley road becomes Brook End, then High Street, and finally Crawley Street. We were about a mile beyond North Crawley on the Crawley Street stretch of the road. We had turned around and started to drive back towards North Crawley.

Suddenly a strange sensation passed through the car. The sensation seemed to 'enter' the car from the right, affecting Jackie, who was driving. It was a cold, prickling feeling like standing next to a big open meat freezer crossed with pins and needles. Jackie felt it in her legs and side, then it hit the right side of my face and crawled around my scalp, neck and finally to my left cheek. Imagine ice-cold pins and needles, but with a dragging sensation as if something was moving over us. It lasted about 20 seconds. It was as if something moved through the car and through us. Jackie switched the interior light on and we both looked on the back seat. There was nothing there. We turned around and drove back through the area, but the sensation did not repeat itself.

Jackie later told me that she was badly frightened and that she felt that something was in the car with us for a while. She confessed she nearly screamed and burst into tears. She said it was one of the most frightening things she had experienced – and she had survived the Nepalese earthquake. I felt no sensation of fear – just the weird physical feeling of the ice-cold prickle.

Richard Freeman

The Cottingley Fairies

I was very interested in your recent article about the Cottingley Fairies [FT410:14-15]. In May 1975 I was working as a researcher on the ITV children's programme *Magpie*. While looking for items that might interest our young audience, I came across an article in *Penthouse* magazine about the Cottingley Fairies written by the journalist and TV presenter Nicolas Witchell. He was kind enough to give me a contact for Elsie Wright, the elder of the two girls, living at the time in Bunny in Nottinghamshire, so I wrote requesting an interview. She replied:

I would like to say that, apart from children and Mr Gardner who helped Conan Doyle with his research into fairy-lore, everyone else I have met I am quite sure have never believed our photographs. All who have come into contact with the Cottingley Fairies story apart from children have enjoyed and got an enormous kick out of two kids telling a fairy story about a fairy story and attempting to be more convincing by producing photographs, though experts say that the photographs were taken with one single exposure, all taken on dull days and that the figures were luminous and moving at the time they were taken. Lyon Lewes of the BBC told me that only now in modern times this can be done with very expensive equipment and definitely not with the old second-hand box camera lent to Frances and myself by my father.

[Since] the first two pictures were taken and hit the headlines, 60 years have passed. My father, along with the village of Cottingley and I'm quite sure the whole of Yorkshire (not including children), were unanimous in looking upon Frances and myself as two solemn-faced Yorkshire comedienettes, and my father was angry that we



In 1981 Elsie and Frances admitted that the photos were fakes

should not benefit in any way from our big illustrated fib.

He did believe it for half a day when Mr Gardner explained to him all the tests that had been put on those first two plates by experts (Ilford and Kodak), but after Mr Gardner had gone and my dad woke up next morning he said "No I don't believe it. You have done it some way."

However from then on my dad stopped asking me. I wish I had a penny for everyone who has said "Tell me how you did it."

About this interview as children have always believed in us I think we should oblige. However, I think they would find it more interesting if you were to interview my cousin Frances as she was only 8 years old when

the first two photographs were taken and I was 15.

I contacted Frances and arranged to meet her in Thanet where she lived. I was looking forward to meeting her. She had been described by psychic investigator Edward Gardner as being mediumistic with "loosely knit ectoplasmic material in her body", implying that the fairies took their substance from her own body. Over a fish and chip lunch, she told me that she had been born and raised in South Africa and only came to Cottingley in 1917, where she had seen many new and surprising things like snow on the ground and water, a precious commodity in Africa, running to waste down the gutters. When she saw the fairies, she assumed they were commonplace. Frances also told me that at the time Elsie, who was a talented artist, had been working as a negative retoucher in a local photographic studio.

The *Magpie* item about the Cottingley Fairies was transmitted on Friday, 11 July 1975. It came to no conclusion about the authenticity of the story, but simply presented the facts as they were known at the time and let the young viewers make up their own mind. My own feeling was Frances sincerely believed in the fairies. She said she had gone into the Cottingley woods expecting nothing and when she got there the fairies were waiting. Elsie on the other hand had fabricated the fairies as a joke to please her cousin only to find herself in the middle of a front-page controversy that she couldn't back out of.

In 1981 Elsie and Frances admitted that the photographs were fakes, inspired by drawings cut out of *Princess Mary's Gift Book* (1915). Frances said: "Two village kids and a brilliant man like Conan Doyle, well, we could only keep quiet. I never even thought of it as a fraud – it was just Elsie and me having a bit of fun and I cannot understand to this day why they were taken in... unless they wanted to be taken in".

Perhaps the nicest, kindest comment about the entire Cottingley Fairy mystery came from photographic scientist Geoffrey Crawley, who finally uncovered the hoax in 1980 [see "Cottingley Unmasked", FT43:48-53, Spring 1985]. He said "Of course there are fairies, just as there is Father Christmas" – and he's right. We may not believe in fairies or Father Christmas ourselves, but can we deny others that conviction, particularly the young? As JM Barrie once said: "Children know such a lot now, they soon don't believe in fairies, and every time a child says 'I don't believe in fairies' there is a little fairy somewhere that falls down dead!"

Martyn Day
London

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past recalls the woman who walked to London to see the Great Exhibition and meet the Queen



21. THE PENZANCE PEDESTRIAN



MARY KELYNACK

The old Newlyn fishwife, who at 80 years of age, walked from Penzance to London with her fish cowl on her back to see Queen Victoria, who accepted ½ lb of Tea from her as a present from Penzance.



Mary Kelynack of Newlyn who walked to London to see the Queen.

ABOVE LEFT: Mary Kelynack walking to London. ABOVE RIGHT: A coloured postcard showing Mary in her old age.

Mary Tresize was born at Madron, near Newlyn in Cornwall, in 1766. She married William Kelynack, a member of a well-known Cornish family, and worked as a fishwife for many years, without ever accomplishing anything interesting or newsworthy. In 1851, when she was 84 years old, she heard about the wonders on show at the Great Exhibition in London. "I'll go and see'n too, I reckon!" she exclaimed and trudged off, dressed in her traditional costume and carrying her 'cowl' or fish-basket on her back.

How Mrs Kelynack supported herself during her

lengthy trudge to London is not known, but it remains a fact that she made it all the way to the metropolis. She wanted to meet the Lord Mayor and the Queen, and to see the Great Exhibition, and managed to fulfil all these three ambitions.

According to the *Illustrated London News*: "On Tuesday, September 24, among the visitors to the Mansion House was Mary Kelynack, eighty-four years old, who had travelled on foot from Penzance, carrying a basket on her head, with the object of visiting the Exhibition and of paying her respects personally to the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress. As

soon as the ordinary business was finished the aged woman entered the justice-room, when the Lord Mayor, addressing her, said 'Well, I understand, Mrs Kelynack, you have come to see me.'" Mary explained that she came from Penzance, and that she had spent five weeks on the road to London. Since she only had five and a half pence, the Lord Mayor gave her a sovereign, telling her to take care of it, since there were a good many thieves in London. Mary had an audience with the Lady Mayoress, and took tea in the housekeeper's room, before leaving the Mansion House. The following day, she went to the Great Exhibition, spending

all day there. She was also presented to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, being greatly moved when she cast eyes on her monarch.

Mary made it all the way back to Newlyn, hopefully by some more convenient mode of transportation than walking. Since she became something of a local celebrity, her bust was exhibited at the Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society. In 1853, she is recorded to have been invited to visit Polytechnic Hall, where the members wanted to see her as a curiosity. In November 1855, the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* had the following notice: "DEATHS - At Newlyn, on Wednesday last, Mrs Mary Kelynack, aged 88 years. (This is the old woman whose walk to London

in 1851 for the purpose of seeing the Great Exhibition excited much interest at the time)." According to her death certificate, she died at Dock Lane, Penzance, on 22 November 1855, having suffered from "paralysis" (presumably after a stroke) for six months.

She was buried in St Mary's churchyard. In 1909, she was featured in Sabine Baring-Gould's *Cornish Characters and Strange Events*, which reproduced the 1851 *Illustrated London News* drawing of her. The same drawing was used to make a picture postcard of her, which was on sale in Edwardian times.

JAMIE MOLLART KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD

THE EARTH'S RESOURCES ARE DWINDLING. THE SOLUTION IS THE SLEEP.

INSIDE A HIBERNATING CITY, BEN STRUGGLES WITH HIS LIMITED WAKING TIME AND THE DISEASE STEALING HIS WIFE FROM HIM. WATCHING OVER THE SLEEPERS, LONELY PERUZZI CRAVES THE FAMILY HE NEVER KNEW.

EVERYWHERE, DISSATISFACTION IS GROWING.

THE CITY IS ABOUT TO WAKE.



'THIS IS A FRIGHTENING, THOUGHTFUL VISION EXPLORING WHERE POWER LIES WHEN EVEN THE ACT OF BEING AWAKE IS REVOLUTIONARY'.

ALIYA WHITELEY, SHORTLISTED FOR THE ARTHUR C. CLARKE AWARD

'I WOULD LIKE TO SEE *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* MADE INTO A 'CLI-FI' FILM, MARKED AS BOTH A CAUTIONARY TALE AND SATIRE'.

JULIET BLAXLAND, SHORTLISTED FOR THE WAINWRIGHT PRIZE

'A HAUNTING VISION OF THE NEAR-FUTURE WITH EXPERT WORLD-BUILDING AND RICH COMPLEX CHARACTERS, *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* KEPT ME GRIPPED FROM BEGINNING TO END'.

TEMI OH, WINNER OF THE ALEX AWARD

'MOLLART'S INTRIGUING AND TIMELY PREMISE IS EXECUTED WITH VERVE - *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* IS FILMIC IN ITS SCOPE'.

ALISON MOORE, SHORTLISTED FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE

'*KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* INTRIGUED ME WITH ITS TITLE AND HAD ME ON PAGE ONE. MOLLART'S DYSTOPIAN VISION IS AS DISTURBING AS IT IS BRILLIANT'.

GILES KRISTIAN, SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *LANCELOT*

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STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Salman Mirza, from Gujarat in India checked into a hotel in Ahmendabad with his former fiancée. Both were drug users and sniffed glue. On this occasion, after taking drugs they decided to have sex, but, lacking condoms, they decided to seal Mirza's penis with the strong epoxy adhesive they had been sniffing. The next day Mirza was found unconscious in bushes near the hotel and taken to hospital where his condition rapidly deteriorated and he died of multiple organ failure as a result of toxicity from the epoxy. *Indiatimes.com, 25 Aug 2021.*

Jason Alan Thornburg, 41, was a well-known character in Eules, Texas, regularly found outside the Mid City Inn where he lived, talking to passers-by about God, handing out religious flyers and offering to help people, sometimes inviting them up to his room. One person who took up the offer was David Lueras, 42, who stayed with Thornburg for several days in mid-September. After he had been there a few days, Thornburg, for some reason, decided that Lueras needed to be "sacrificed" cutting his throat, then dismembering the body and storing the remains in plastic bins. Over the next few days, two unnamed female acquaintances of Thornburg also turned up at his room and he decided they, too, needed to be "sacrificed", killing and dismembering them as well, and adding their remains to the storage bins. When neighbours started to complain about the smell Thornburg took the remains 25 miles away and tried to burn them in a skip. Police, though, were still able to identify Lueras's remains by his tattoos and a medical implant and traced him back to the hotel room he'd shared with Thornburg.

Arrested, Thornburg admitted the killings, describing them as "sacrifices". He also admitted killing a girlfriend in Arizona as another sacrifice. His arrest also caused renewed interest in the death of a former housemate, Mark Jewell, 61, killed when their home exploded in May and not considered a homicide at the time, but Thornburg, who had given a eulogy at Jewell's funeral, admitted to cutting Jewell's throat and setting the house on fire to cover the crime. *chron.com, 1 Oct 2021.*

An allergic reaction killed a daredevil melon farmer in Astrakhan, Russia, after a stunt being filmed for YouTube went

wrong. The 55-year-old farmer was amusing other fieldworkers by catching field vipers and putting them in his mouth head-first when, on his third attempt, one bit him on the tongue. While venomous, field viper bites should not be lethal to humans, but a few hours after the bite, the farmer's tongue and throat started swelling massively, obstructing his breathing. He was rushed to Kharabalinskiy district hospital and diagnosed with Quinke's edema, a form of allergic reaction, and frantic efforts by doctors failed to save him.

Apparently, snake-swallowing is a popular trick among locals and the hospital put out a statement saying: "You just should not try to swallow a snake or carry out any other experiments if you are not sure that it may end up in an unfavourable way for you." *D.Star, 25 Sept 2021.*

Helena Randall, 29, died after she was struck by a car driven by Peter Sinclair, 55, in Handforth, Cheshire. Sinclair, though, was asleep at the time. According to the coroner at Randall's inquest, Sinclair was suffering from a "nocturnal seizure" following a 14-hour night shift. This led to him driving while asleep, leaving a trail of destruction as he drove through the town at speed on the wrong side of the road, crashing three times before finally going through a red light and killing Randall.

Also apparently asleep was 17-year-old Benjamin Elliot, who allegedly stabbed his twin sister Meghan to death. He told police that he awoke between 2.30am and 3am and found himself in his sister's room and saw that she had a knife in her neck. Realising he was not dreaming he called 911 and tried to stem the bleeding and apply CPR. Elliot had no history of sleep disorders, nor had he taken any drugs or drunk alcohol the previous evening and there was no history of trouble between the twins, described as "the best of friends". *D.Mirror, 8 May 2021; lawandcrime.com, 1 Oct 2021.*

Failing to find any toilets after drinking heavily on Pledade Beach in Jabotao dos Guararapes, Brazil, Marcelo Rocha Santos, 53, waded waist-deep in the sea to relieve himself, but was grabbed and killed by a shark, making him the 13th person to die of a shark attack on that stretch of coast. *Metro, 13 Jul 2021.*



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